



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

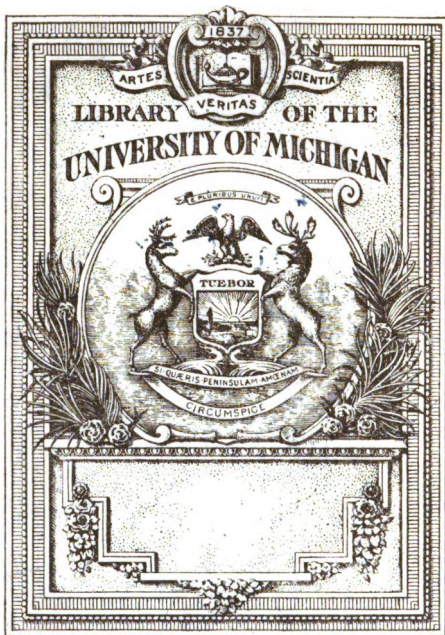
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



828

B885

C2







# STUDIES IN BROWNING

# THE BIJOU SERIES.

*Consisting of Eight Uniform Volumes, daintily bound in Cloth or Lambskin.*

**Prices:** In Cloth, 1s. 6d. net; In Lambskin, 2s. net.

1. **TENNYSON'S "IN MEMORIAM."** By CHARLES MANSFORD, late Vice-Principal of the Westminster Training College.

"The work is admirably done. In its compass it is the most meritorious of all commentaries that have appeared."—*Literary World*.

2. **THE MESSAGE OF MAN: A BOOK OF ETHICAL SCRIPTURES.** Arranged by STANTON COIT, Ph.D. With a Frontispiece after G. F. Watts.

"The idea, an excellent one, has been well worked out. It must have cost the painstaking compiler an immense amount of time and trouble to gather from so many sources, sacred and profane, these scattered scraps of wisdom and co-ordinate them so methodically and elaborately."—*Catholic Times*.

3. **GEMS FROM THE VICTORIAN ANTHOLOGY.** By the Right Hon. Sir MOUNTSTUART E. GRANT DUFF, late Governor of the Madras Presidency.

"An excellent little book studded with the fine gold of names which helped to make the great Victorian era so rich in poetry."—*T.P.'s Weekly*.

4. **BROWNING'S "A DEATH IN THE DESERT."** By the Rev. G. U. POPE, D.D., Balliol College, Oxford.

"Is a 'help and very plain-sailing guide to the would-be reader of Browning: the editor himself being an enthusiast in the study of the master. Browning is best explained by Browning, as Mr. Pope says, and it seems a pity that the student is not more often referred to other poems.'"—*School World*.

5. **HINTS TO RECITERS.** By the late CLIFFORD HARRISON. Edited by his friend, HERBERT HARDINGE. With a portrait.

"An invaluable little manual, which is all the legacy we have of a brave and admirable soul."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"Full of practical advice for aspirants to the honours of the drawing-room hearth."—*Scotsman*.

6. **A BROWNING PRIMER.** A Companion to the pocket volume of "Selections from Browning." By E. P. DEFRIES. With an Introduction by Dr. F. J. FURNIVALL. [SEVENTH THOUSAND.]

"A piece of conscientious work highly creditable alike to the author's industry, appreciative taste, and capacity for clear expression."—*Morning Post*.

7. **GLEANINGS FROM THE TALMUD.** By the Rev. WILLIAM MACINTOSH, M.A., Ph.D.

"This neat little volume contains an interesting collection of aphorisms, anecdotes, and parables from the Talmud."—*Glasgow Herald*.

8. **BROWNING'S "SAUL" AND OTHER POEMS.** By SUSAN CUNNINGTON, Author of "The Story of Arithmetic."

London: SWAN SONNENSCHN & Co., Ltd.,  
25, High Street, Bloomsbury.



*Robt. C.*  
**Studies in Browning**

**Four Poems**

**SAUL**

**THE EPISTLE OF KARSHISH THE  
ARAB PHYSICIAN**

**A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL  
OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE**

**By SUSAN CUNNINGTON**

**EDITOR OF SHELLEY'S "ADONAIS" ETC**



**LONDON**

**SWAN SONNENSCHN & CO LTD**

**NEW YORK : E. P. DUTTON & CO**

**1906**

**BUTLER & TANNER,  
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS.  
FROME, AND LONDON.**

## PREFACE

THIS little book has been prepared in the hope that it may be an aid to the literary study of Literature. Too often the reading of Poetry is pursued in one or other of two different and regrettable ways. One is that of idle acceptance of any expression not at once understood as Poetry, and therefore justifiably vague ; and the other that of undertaking laborious verbal study with but little attention to the spirit and thought.

The poetry of Browning is especially liable to suffer in the reader's appreciation if either of these methods is adopted. His rich eloquence, wide sympathies, vivid interest and encyclopædic knowledge result in a wealth of matter in almost every short utterance, and an equal wealth of suggestiveness in his rapid transitions, parenthetical allusions and varied treatment.

When the gist of his subject-matter is understood and the main lines of thought grasped, the reader is able to enjoy and appreciate, indeed, even to share, the inspiration of his enthusiasm. The few helps offered here are intended to supply the elucidation needed for such enjoyment and appreciation.

S. C.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	7
SAUL . . . . .	13
OUTLINE STUDY . . . . .	38
NOTES . . . . .	55
EPISTLE OF KARSHISH THE PHYSICIAN . . . . .	61
OUTLINE STUDY . . . . .	74
NOTES . . . . .	85
A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL . . . . .	95
OUTLINE STUDY . . . . .	102
NOTES . . . . .	110
OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE . . . . .	115
OUTLINE STUDY . . . . .	128
NOTES . . . . .	139



## INTRODUCTION

IN selecting these four poems as studies in Browning, I have been influenced, first by their high intrinsic interest, and next by the fact that they are not without an underlying unity of idea, in spite of their wide separation in subject, time, and circumstance. Each expresses, or indicates more subtly than by expression, the joy of the worker in his work.

With the subject of SAUL every one has some familiarity, though it is to be feared that the conventional estimate, due to idle reading or listening prevails. This the poem serves largely to correct. The first Hebrew King appears in no way as a mere foil to his great successor; whilst to the latter is assigned the task of uttering the most eloquent plea for the recognition of the law of Love. Remembering how persistently poems by later poets of his race were attributed to him, there is something far from incongruous in supposing him also to express the wide thought and the developed enthusiasm of the nineteenth-cen-

tury poet. But the feature which the poem has in common with the remaining three is the detailed exercise of the supposed minstrel's art, as he persevered in his superb and strenuous effort for the solace and restoration of the sufferer. Though so far removed from us in time and condition, we are compelled to recognize the mastery of the technical description which suggests, besides the image of the shepherd on the Syrian plains, whole avenues of thought and speculation as to the arts, attainments and ideals of the individuals of that distant community.

THE EPISTLE OF KARSHISH no less skilfully brings forward the side usually overlooked, in its narration of the story of Lazarus. Every one on reading it is probably led to feel that whatever else may be asked of supreme Love, the one thing not to be asked is the return of one who has passed through the gate of death. The strength and vigour of the telling anew of the familiar story are much enhanced by the verisimilitude of the technical details. The Arab physician becomes a known personality : absorbed in the matters of his profession and engrossed in the finer points of skill in his art ; with little tricks of manner and of speech which proclaim him a member of a privileged caste. He, too, at the close of his epistle is made to



utter an apostrophe to the true regenerating power, the Spirit of Love.

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL belongs to a period nearly twelve centuries later, and to Europe instead of Africa ; but it shares in the characteristic of affectionate description of technicalities. The setting of the picture is no less skilful ; no less important ; no less full of suggestiveness. The lighthearted irony of tone maintained throughout is, as it were, symbolical of a gaiety of spirit belonging to southern climes and brighter temperaments than ours ; belonging, too, to the vividly interested mediæval thinkers. But no careful or appreciative reader will fail to see that the theme and the treatment are—like the subject—"loftier than the world suspects."

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE emphasizes the characteristic named by its riot of technicalities : its exuberance of intimate description of peculiarities, personal and artistic, and its glancing allusiveness to painters and methods and the poet's own wishes and whimsies. But to read and enjoy its exhilarating verse is to take as it were a bird's-eye view of Italian art, and to focus at least one aspect permanently in the mind.

Throughout I have endeavoured to supply only such notes as are necessary for the enjoy-

ment of the poems ; they are necessarily rather fuller for OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE than for SAUL. With poetry such as Browning's, once the detail referred to is known, fuller illumination and delight follow the reading and re-reading of his lines than can be supplied by long discussions of the matters referred to.

BRIGHTON, 1905.

S. C.

**SAUL**



## SAUL

### I

SAID Abner, "At last thou art come ! Ere I  
tell, ere thou speak,

Kiss my cheek, wish me well ! " Then I wished  
it and did kiss his cheek.

And he, " Since the King, O my friend, for thy  
countenance sent,

Neither drunken nor eaten have we ; nor until  
from his tent

Thou return with the joyful assurance the King  
liveth yet,

Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the  
water be wet.

For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space  
of three days,

Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of  
prayer nor of praise,

To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended  
their strife,

And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch  
sinks back upon life.

## 14 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

### II

Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved ! God's  
child with His dew  
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still  
living and blue  
Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings,  
as if no wild heat  
Were now raging to torture the desert ! "

### III

Then I, as was meet,  
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose  
on my feet,  
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The  
tent was unlooped ;  
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under  
I stooped :  
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch,  
all withered and gone,  
That extends to the second enclosure, I groped  
my way on,  
Till I felt where the fold-skirts fly open. Then  
once more I prayed,  
And opened the fold-skirts and entered, and was  
not afraid  
But spoke, " Here is David, thy servant ! " And  
no voice replied.  
At the first I saw nought but the blackness ;  
but soon I descried

A something more black than the blackness—  
the vast—the upright  
Main prop which sustains the pavilion : and  
slow into sight  
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest  
of all.  
Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof,  
showed Saul.

## IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms  
stretched out wide  
On the great cross-support in the centre, that  
goes to each side ;  
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as,  
caught in his pangs  
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all  
heavily hangs,  
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliver-  
ance come  
With the Springtime, so agonized Saul, drear  
and stark, blind and dumb.

## V

The, I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we  
twine round its chords  
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide—  
those sunbeams like swords !  
And I first played the tune all our sheep know  
as, one after one,

## 16 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

So docile they come to the pen-door till folding  
be done.

They are white and untorn by the bushes, for,  
lo, they have fed

Where the long grasses stifle the water within  
the stream's bed ;

And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star  
follows star

Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and  
so far !

### VI

Then the tune for which quails on the corn land  
will each leave his mate

To fly after the player ; then, what makes the  
crickets elate

Till for boldness they fight one another ; and  
then, what has weight

To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand-  
house—

There are none such as he for a wonder, half  
bird and half mouse !

God made all the creatures and gave them our  
love and our fear,

To give sign we and they are His children, one  
family here.

### VII

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers  
their wine-song, when hand



Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship,  
and great hearts expand  
And grow one in the sense of this world's life ;  
And then the last song  
When the dead man is praised on his journey—  
“ Bear, bear him along  
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets !  
Are balm-seeds not here  
To console us ? The land has none left such as  
he on the bier.  
Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother ! ”—  
And then the glad chaunt  
Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens,  
next, she whom we vaunt  
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.—And  
then the great march *wow*  
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and  
buttress an arch  
Naught can break ; who shall harm them, our  
friends ?

Then the chorus intoned  
As the Levites go up to the altar in glory en-  
throned,  
But I stopped here : for here in the darkness  
Saul groaned.

## VIII

And I paused, held my breath in such silence  
and listened apart ;

B

And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered :  
 and sparkles 'gan dart  
 From the jewels that woke in his turban, at  
 once with a start  
 All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courage-  
 ous at heart.  
 So the head : but the body still moved not,  
 still hung there erect.  
 And I bent once again to my playing, pursued  
 it unchecked,  
 As I sang,—

## IX

Oh, our manhood's prime vigour ! No spirit  
 feels waste,  
 Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew  
 unbraced.  
 X Oh, the wild joys of living ! the leaping from  
 rock up to rock,  
 The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree,  
 the cool silver shock  
 Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt  
 of the bear,  
 And the sultriness showing the lion is couched  
 in his lair.  
 And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with  
 gold dust divine,  
 And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the  
 full draught of wine,

And the sleep in the dried river-channel where  
bulrushes tell

That the water was wont to go warbling so  
softly and well.

How good is man's life, the mere living ! how  
fit to employ

All the heart and the sou' and the senses for ever  
in joy !

Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father,  
whose sword thou didst guard

When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for  
glorious reward ?

Didst thou kiss the thin hands of thy mother,  
held up as men sung

The low song of the nearly departed, and hear  
her faint tongue

Joining in while it could to the witness, " Let  
one more attest,

I have lived, seen God's hand thro' a lifetime,  
and all was for best ! "

Then they sang thro' their tears in strong  
triumph, not much, but the rest,

And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the  
working whence grew

Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the  
spirit strained true :

And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood  
of wonder and hope,

Present promise and wealth of the future be-  
yond the eye's scope,—

## 20 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

Till, lo, thou art grown to a monarch ; a people  
is thine :

And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on  
one head combine !

On one head, all the beauty and strength, love  
and rage (like the throe

That, a-work in the rock, helps its labour and let  
the gold go)

High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame  
crowning them,—all

Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—  
King Saul ! ”

### X

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,—heart,  
hand, harp and voice,

Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each  
bidding rejoice

Saul's fame in the light it was made for—as  
when, dare I say ? *companion*

The Lord's army in rapture of service strains  
through its array,

And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot—“ Saul,”  
cried I, and stopped,

And waited the thing that should follow. Then  
Saul, who hung propped

By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was  
struck by his name.

Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons  
goes right to the aim,

And some mountain, the last to withstand her,  
that held (he alone,  
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers)  
on a broad bust of stone  
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,  
leaves grasp of the sheet?  
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously  
down to his feet,  
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet,  
your mountain of old,  
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of  
ages untold:  
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each  
furrow and scar  
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest—  
all hail, there they are! ✓  
—Now again to be softened with verdure, again  
hold the nest  
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to  
the green on his crest  
For their food in the ardours of summer. One  
long shudder thrilled  
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank  
and was stilled  
At the King's self left standing before me, re-  
leased and aware.  
What was gone? What remained? All to  
traverse 'twixt hope and despair.  
Death was past, life not come: so he waited.  
Awhile his right hand

## 22 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

Held the brow, helped the eyes, left too vacant,  
forthwith to remand  
To their place what new objects should enter :  
'twas Saul as before.  
I looked up, dared gaze at those eyes,—nor was  
hurt any more  
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn ye  
watch from the shore,  
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean—a sun's  
slow decline  
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'er-  
lap and entwine  
Base with base to knit strength more intensely :  
so, arm folded arm  
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

### XI

What spell or what charm  
(For awhile there was trouble within me), what  
next should I urge  
To sustain him where song had restored him ?  
Song filled to the verge  
His cup with the vine of this life, pressing all  
that it yields  
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty :  
beyond, on what fields  
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to  
brighten the eye,

Bring blood to the lip, and commend them the  
cup they put by ?  
He saith, " It is good," still he drinks not : he  
lets me praise life,  
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

## XII

Then fancies grew rife  
Which had come long ago on the pasture, when  
round me the sheep  
Fed in silence—above, the one eagle wheeled  
slow as in sleep ;  
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world  
that might lie  
'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip  
'twixt the hill and the sky.  
And I laughed—" Since my days are ordained  
to be passed with my flocks,  
Let me people at least with my fancies, the plains  
and the rocks,  
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image  
the show  
Of mankind as they live in those fashions I  
hardly shall know—  
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses,  
the courage that gains,  
And the prudence that keeps what men strive  
for ! " And now these old trains  
Of vague thought came again ; I grew surer ; so,  
once more the string  
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus—

## XIII

“ Yea, my King,”  
I began, “ thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts that spring  
From the mere mortal life held in common by man and by brute :  
In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.  
Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how its stem trembled first  
Till it passed the kid’s lip, the stag’s antler ; then safely outburst  
The fan-branches all round ; and thou mindest when these too, in turn,  
Broke abloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect : yet more was to learn,  
E’en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit.  
Our dates shall we slight,  
When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow ? or care for the plight  
Of the palm’s self whose slow growth produced them ? Not so ! stem and branch  
Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the palm-wine shall staunch  
Every wound of man’s spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine,  
Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for ! the spirit be thine !



By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee,  
thou still shalt enjoy,  
More indeed than at first, when unconscious, the  
life of a boy.

Crush that life, and behold its wine running !  
Each deed thou hast done

Dies, revives, goes to work in the world ; until  
e'en as the sun,

Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil  
him, though tempests efface,

Can find nothing his own deed produced not,  
must everywhere trace

The results of his past summer-prime,—so,  
each ray of thy will,

Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long  
over, shall thrill

Thy whole people, the countless, with ardour,  
till they too give forth

A like cheer to their sons : who in turn fill the  
South and the North

With the radiance thy deed was the germ of.  
Carouse in the past !

But the licence of age has its limit ; thou diest  
at last.

As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose  
at her height,

So with man—so his power and his beauty for  
ever take flight.

No ! Again a long draught of my soul-wine !  
Look forth o'er the years !

## 26 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual ;  
     begin with the seer's !  
 Is Saul dead ? In the depth of the vale make  
     his tomb,—bid arise  
 A grey mountain of marble heaped four-square,  
     till, built to the skies,  
 Let it mark where the great First King slumbers :  
     whose fame would ye know ?  
 Up above see the rock's naked face, where the  
     record shall go  
 In great characters cut by the scribe,—Such was  
     Saul, so he did ;  
 With the sages directing the work, by the popu-  
     lace chid,—  
 For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there !  
     Which fault to amend,  
 In the grove with his kind grows the cedar,  
     whereon they shall spend  
 (See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their  
     praise, and record  
 With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,—the  
     statesman's great word  
 Side by side with the poet's sweet comment.  
     The river's awake  
 With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other  
     when prophet-winds rave :  
 So the pen gives unborn generations their due  
     and their part  
 In thy being ! Then, first of the mighty, thank  
     God that thou art !

## XIV

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who  
didst grant me, that day,  
And before it not seldom hast granted thy help  
to essay,  
Carry on and complete an adventure,—my  
Shield and my Sword.  
In that act where my soul was Thy servant, Thy  
Word was my word,  
Still help me, who then at the summit of human  
endeavour  
And, scaling the highest man's thought could,  
gazed hopeless as ever  
On the new stretch of heaven above me, till—  
mighty to save—  
Just one lift of Thy hand cleared that distance—  
God's throne from man's grave!  
Let me tell out my tale to its ending—my voice  
to my heart—  
Which scarce dares believe in what marvels  
last night I took part,  
As this morning I gather the fragments, alone  
with my sheep!  
And fear lest the terrible glory evanish like  
sleep.  
For I wake in the grey dewy covert while Hebron  
upheaves,  
Dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and  
Kedron retrieves  
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

## XV

I say then,—my song  
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch and,  
    ever more strong,  
Made a proffer of good to console him,—he slowly  
    resumed  
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The  
    right hand replumed  
His black locks to their wonted composure,  
    adjusted the swathes  
Of his turban, and see,—the huge sweat, that his  
    countenance bathes,  
He wipes off with his robe ; and he girds now  
    his loins as of yore,  
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the  
    clasp set before.  
He is Saul, ye remember in glory ; ere error had  
    bent  
The broad brow from the daily communion ;  
    and still, though much spent  
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the  
    same God did choose  
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate,  
    never quite lose.  
So sank he along by the tent-prop, till stayed  
    by the pile  
Of his armour and war-cloak and garments, he  
    leaned there awhile,  
And sat out my singing ; one arm round the  
    tent prop to raise

His bent head, and the other hung slack, till  
I touched on the praise  
I foresaw, from all men in all time, to the man  
patient there ;  
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then  
first I was 'ware  
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above  
his vast knees,  
Which were thrust out on each side around me,  
like oak-roots which please  
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked  
up to know  
If the best I could do had brought solace : he  
spoke not, but slow  
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it  
with care  
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my  
brow : thro' my hair  
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back  
my head with kind power—  
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do  
a flower.  
Thus held he me there with his great eyes—that  
scrutinized mine—  
And oh, all my heart how it loved him ! but  
where was the sign ?  
I yearned—" Could I help thee, my father  
inventing a bliss,  
I would add to that life of the past both the  
future and this ;

30 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

I would give thee new life altogether, as good,  
ages hence  
As this moment, had love but the warrant love's  
heart to dispense ! "

*here*

XVI

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more—  
no song more ! outbroke—

XVII

" I have gone the whole round of creation : I  
saw and I spoke ;  
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received  
in my brain  
And pronounced on the rest of His handiwork—  
returned Him again  
His creation's approval or censure : I spoke as  
I saw,  
Reported as man may of God's work,—all's love,  
yet all's law.  
Now I lay down the judgeship He lent me. Each  
faculty tasked  
To perceive Him has gained an abyss where a  
dewdrop was asked.  
Have I knowledge ? confounded it shrivels at  
Wisdom laid bare.

These good things being given, to go on and give  
one more, the best ?

Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, main-  
tain at the height

This perfection,—succeed, with life's day-  
spring, death's minute of night :

Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul  
the mistake,

Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now, and bid  
him awake

From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to  
find himself set

Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new  
harmony yet

To be run and continued, and ended—who  
knows ?—or endure !

The man taught enough by life's dream, of the  
rest to make sure ;

By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning  
intensified bliss,

And the next world's reward and repose, by the  
struggles in this.

## XVIII

I believe it ! 'Tis Thou, God, that givest, 'tis I  
who receive :

In the first is the last, in Thy will is my power  
to believe.

*Philosophy*

# 34 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

All's one gift: Thou canst grant it, moreover,  
as prompt to my prayer

As I breathe out this breath, as I open these  
arms to the air.

From Thy will stream the worlds, life and nature,  
Thy dread Sabaoth:

I will?—the mere atoms despise me! Why am  
I not loth

To look that, even that in the face too? Why  
is it I dare

Think but lightly of such impuissance? What  
stops my despair?

*philos* This: 'tis not what man Does which exalts him,  
but what man Would do!

See the King,—I would help him, but cannot, the  
wishes fall through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow,  
grow poor to enrich,

To fill up his life starve my own out, I would—  
knowing which,

I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak  
through me now!

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst  
Thou, so wilt Thou!

So shall crown Thee the topmost, ineffablest,  
uttermost crown—

And Thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave  
up nor down



One spot for the creature to stand in ! It is by  
no breath,

Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins  
issue with death !

As Thy love is discovered Almighty, Almighty  
be proved

Thy power that exists with and for it, of being  
beloved !

He who did most shall bear most ; the strongest  
shall stand the most weak.

'Tis the weakness' in strength that I cry for !  
my flesh that I seek

In the Godhead ! I seek and I find it. O  
Saul, it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee ; a man  
like to me

Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever ; a  
Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee !  
See the Christ stand ! "

## XIX

I know not too well how I found my way home  
in the night.

There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left  
and to right,

Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the  
alive, the aware :

### 36 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as  
strugglingly there,

As a runner beset by the populace famished for  
news—

Life or death. The whole earth was awakened,  
hell loosed with her crews ;

And the stars of night beat with emotion, and  
tingled and shot

Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge :  
but I fainted not,

For the Hand that impelled me at once and  
supported, suppressed

All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet,  
and holy behest,

Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth  
sank to rest.

Anon, at the dawn, all that trouble had withered  
from earth—

Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's  
tender birth :

In the gathered intensity brought to the grey of  
the hills ;

In the shuddering forests' held breath ; in the  
sudden wind-thrills ;

In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each  
with eye sidling still,

Though averted with wonder and dread ; in  
the birds stiff and chill

That rose heavily as I approached them, made  
stupid with awe :

E'en the serpent that slid away silent—he felt  
the new law.

The same stared in the white humid faces  
upturned by the flowers ;

The same worked in the heart of the cedar and  
moved the vine-bowers :

And the little brooks witnessing, murmured,  
persistent and low,

With their obstinate, all-but-hushed voices—  
“ E'en so, it is so ! ”

# OUTLINE STUDY

## SAUL

Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish . . . a mighty man of power. And he had a son whose name was Saul, a choice young man and a goodly ; and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he : from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.

\* \* \* \*

And when Samuel saw Saul the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of ! this same shall reign over My people.

\* \* \* \*

And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us (and he passed on), but stand thou still a while that I may show thee the word of God.

\* \* \* \*

And it was so that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart ; and all those signs came to pass that day.

\* \* \* \*

And all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal : and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace-offerings before the Lord, and then Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

\* \* \* \*

So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side . . . and whithersoever he turned himself he vexed them. . . .

And the name of the captain of his host was Abner, the son of Ner, Saul's uncle.

\* \* \* \*

But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants which are before thee to seek out a man who is a cunning player on an harp : and it shall come to pass when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.

And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well and bring him to me.

\* \* \* \*

And David came to Saul and stood before him, and he loved him greatly ; and he became his armour-bearer.

\* \* \* \*

And it came to pass when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand ; so Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

\* \* \* \*

But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

\* \* \* \*

Thus, in brief outline, reads the Bible narrative upon which the poem is based. Familiar to all English readers from earliest youth, all must have some clear preconception in their minds as to the subject. They have also in mind the sad ending, the final declension of the central character and his miserable death. But however familiar the story may be, perhaps it is only with mature years that its full pathos and significance can appear. The judging, scolding instinct of the young mind necessarily fostered by the usual classification of historical personages as "good" or "bad," must be dominated by the larger charity of comprehension before the true tragedy can be realized.

Then in a deep and solemn sense indeed is the history of Saul "written for our learning;" and the lessons are as various as the readers.

The inevitable and obvious one is not that which Browning has chosen to emphasize. By means of his fuller dramatic treatment of a dramatic incident we are led to identify the occasion as that of David's last effective visit, when the mysterious charm of his music was successful as it had been before: when, too, his growing knowledge of the king had brought him under the spell of the gifted personality that won the admiring affection of his countrymen. The episode may be judged to belong to the middle period of Saul's kingship. A long interval followed his choice and anointing by Samuel, during which took place his education and training at one of the Schools of the Prophets founded by the great Magistrate, and his assumption on more than one occasion of the position of military leader against invading bands. The judgment and prowess displayed on these occasions led to his selection as leader of the Army, and thus to his formal occupation of the throne.

Early in this period he is confronted by circumstances that test his moral character no less than his physical qualities, and the light, unstable element that characterized his youth

leads to failure. The mercurial temperament that is at once perhaps cause and accompaniment of this, develops under the strain into its natural complement, depression and melancholy; and his spirit often strays amongst the shadows of disappointment and perplexity.

In the third and final period he is at open war with the traditions of his distinguished past, and sees the growing forces of hostility subtly arrayed against him and culminating in the person of the popular idol, David.

In many ways Saul is a startling prototype of our English king, *Richard II*, as shown in Shakespeare. The great attractiveness of the wayward character, the fine (temporary) results of the steadying influence that could mould but not refine the baser metal of his mind, the tragic retribution that leaves us with rebuke unuttered, and afraid, are seen in the career of each. We may even see in Samuel the thwartingly-rebuking influence that, like the Duke of Gaunt with King Richard, showed the wilful monarch the picture of himself continually erring. The high promise of early youth displayed in both with a gay and resolute seizing of a mission that augured well for the days to come; the one leading gallant bands against vexing hostile tribes and quelling them, the other turning the clamour of civil insurgents with address



and mastery. A marked difference in the two spiritual careers is that Saul appeared to lose his less worthy characteristics during the period of training and preparation for his great future, where, alas ! they too surely re-asserted themselves ; while with Richard they fell away only under the adversity that came too late and too relentlessly to do other than crush.

In the early middle period, then, of Saul's life we see him the recognized and established monarch, enjoying the accessories as well as the duties of kingship. The members of his clan have shared his greatness ; his relative and senior, Abner, is head of the Forces, which stand as the large symbol of a king whose position has arisen from, and is based upon, war. One at least of his sons is a lad of promise ; in the years to come his friendship and his filial love are to be enshrined in incidents that are amongst the earliest records of the gentler things of life. It is in accordance with this placing that the great invasion of the Philistines under their giant champion has not yet taken place, so the first of personal jealousy have not yet been imprinted in the King's mind ; and his attitude towards his skilful and loving harpist is one of gracious tenderness.

One feature of the incident is selected by Browning for vivid treatment, a feature taken

completely for granted in the frugality of detail in the Hebrew narrative, In the original version the poem ended with *Stanza ix*; and in that form it gave so much of the Bible story as is concerned with the central incident, in the form of a recital by David himself on the day following the experience. Several years later the poem was completed by the addition of ten more stanzas; in which are dealt with the actual emotions and conditions of the restored King, and the inspired consolations which are needed to sustain him. Following the Christian interpretation of many of the utterances ascribed to David in the lyric poetry of the Hebrews, Browning develops his central thought until he finds the crown and consummation of the highest human effort and desire in the personality of the Messiah. With Love as the guiding principle of life everything is seen by the enlightened eye as falling into place and contributing towards a final perfection.

Our consciousness of the growing deterioration and misery of the faulty King only intensifies our perception of the large tenderness of the mature mind in thus completing the early idyll, and triumphantly proclaiming the possibilities for "Saul the failure." Since we possess the poem in its completed form we owe it both to its creator and itself to study it thus. Several

of the poems in the collection, *Men and Women*, in which it appeared when finished, were "translations into song," of old Italian pictures; and it almost seems as though the poet studied his own word-cameo of the Bible episode, and sang the inspired completion.

Considering the poem as a whole we note first that the teller is more than a mere narrator; the subject not only a theme but an experience. Estimated by their real worth and meaning, the few hours of poignant sympathy and aching desire in Saul's tent perhaps counted for more in the life of David than did his marvellous escapes, brilliant achievements and adventurous career. It is the "high moments" that make for life, not the crowded hours.

1. The opening lines plunge us at once into the stress and urgency of the <sup>Stanzas</sup> i., ii., iii. occasion; and the portrayal of the noble Abner and the gracious youth, and their relations to each other, creates the atmosphere of familiar remoteness with which the sacred stories always seem to be invested. The web of mystery which surrounds an Oriental monarch; the devoted sympathy of the warrior-court; the old-world pre-scientific reverence for mental disease; the aspects of Nature under the Syrian sun; are all suggested in a few rapid touches.

2. The paroxysm described, perhaps the *Stanzas* culminating phase of the attack, iv.—viii. is illustrated by a simile from natural history singularly suitable to the condition of the narrator. The prompt recourse to his instrument shows, better than long descriptions, the shocked horror of the singer at beholding his monarch in this disordered state. The list of airs played in rapid succession is full of suggestiveness.

- I. They are in ascending order of meaning ; at first soothing, then cheering, then closely connected with human interests of increasing solemnity.
- II. They arouse our interest in the social and domestic life of a people whose songs must always be of importance to us.
- III. Though little is known as to the technical excellence or the theory of Hebrew music, its effectiveness as an aid to expression is amply indicated in the Bible literature.
- IV. The reflection accompanying each is that which—in its rudimentary form—we readily connect with the personality of the narrator. The Hebrew Shepherd may well have wondered at the “blue far above us” ; have known and loved

the small animals of his country ; have understood and cared for the inner meaning of the labour-songs, dirges, nuptial songs and sacred hymns, with which his musical gift made him so familiar.

3. Encouraged by the effect of the melodies,

*Stanza* the player next adds voice to  
*ix.* instrument ; using thus an appeal

stronger than that of association. *First*, the Joy of Life : a realization more akin to the Celtic temperament than to the colder Saxon, but native to the dweller under Syrian suns. *Next*, the universality of the claims of family and friends : a readily-acknowledged influence in all communities, and of singular strength in those in the "clan" stage of development. *Lastly*, the personal appeal ; with whatever Oriental or courtly exaggeration, at bottom essentially true. To appreciate this we may make careful study of the Bible story, and translate into modern parlance the characteristics and achievements of the First Hebrew King.

4. The splendid image "each lifting Saul's

*Stanza* name out of sorrow" reminds us  
*x.* of the importance attached to the

*name* of a person in the mind of primitive man. The literature of the Bible continually impresses this upon us ; each little child of our own era

in the civilized world goes through the phase of identifying the person with the name. Apart from the intellectual interest is the tenderness of the expression, "out of sorrow." The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and the sympathetic diagnosis of the wild moods of melancholy is simply "sorrow."

The parenthetical description of the gradual retreat of winter from a lofty mountain height subtly prepares the mind for the impressive side of Saul's personality; his commanding stature, warlike achievements, resolute daring and responsible position; and introduces the slow succession of the various stages of his recovery. As an artistic device it reminds us of those "accelerating" or "retarding" touches in Shakespeare, by means of which he seems to hasten or delay the action.<sup>1</sup>

5. Though roused from his miserable lethargy  
*Stanzas* by the impassioned appeal there  
 xi., xii., xiii. is still wanting to the monarch  
 an incentive to rise above its influence. The  
 healing science of the modern world recognizes  
 the perils of the chamber swept and garnished,  
 but unoccupied by suitable presences, as completely  
 as the old-world theories of "possession." Stirred  
 even beyond his former intensity the

<sup>1</sup> See "Dramatic Time" in Mr. and Mrs. Cowden Clarke's *Shakespeare Key*.

singer recalls his own aspirations in his hours of solitary watching, and pours forth an eager flood of his self-communings on "Schemes of Life, its best Rules and Right Uses." His parable from nature is beautifully in keeping with his condition and circumstances. Wisdom is not withheld from its lovers for want of a channel of instructed comprehension ; and a law as sure and true as that of the survival of the fittest had shown itself to him in the processes of growth. The palm-tree puts forth no foliage until its height has placed it above the dangers of the ground ; the full beauty then displayed is only the promise and earnest of what is to come ; even the fruit has not served its purpose till it has been crushed and pressed into wine ; nor the wine until it has been stored in darkness and silence for long. And so the tree may be dead, and even its place forgotten before the wine has accomplished the great aim of the existence of the sapling. The daring analogy of the perishing battered king and the recurring influence of his deeds in the days to come is explicitly laid down ; and then lest insistence on the certainty of death overshadow the idea of his immortal memory and permanent inspiration to others, the strain merges into a gorgeous pæan on the Great First King.

Again our recollection of the actual story gives

D

pathos to the seer's version. Instead of the colossal mausoleum with its inscriptions, and the learning of the sages vying with the enthusiasm of the people, we think of the despairing suicide, the insulting triumph of the foe, and the shamed and hasty burning of the recovered body. Not but that the singer's own elegy is a more permanent and impressive memorial than the "mountain of marble heaped four-square" of his enthusiastic vision.

6. The parenthesis (*Stanza* xiv.) within a parenthesis, "O Thou . . . still  
*Stanzas*      help me . . . Let me tell out my  
 xiv., xv.      tale . . ." reproduces the spirit of the Davidic psalms and unites with it the introspective characteristic of the lyric of the modern world. The succeeding description of the gradual resumption of composed behaviour is minutely intimate; and the imposing dignity of the King, as his soothed mind responds to the stimulus of the conception, justifies the hyperbolic "First of the Mighty." The deep truth underlying this was one with which Browning was in entire sympathy. That a man is inspired to better things by being believed capable of them was to him a conviction as clear as the companion one,—that a man's real attainment lies in his aspiration—not merely in the evident achievement. The eager tender sym-



pathy of the young heart is fully expressed in the simple "I yearned——," and the torrent of ardent desire to comfort bursts forth in a longing for the gift of immortality to bestow. In connection with this may be noted that the belief in personal immortality was one which took many years to develop amongst the Hebrews. Though in New Testament times the idea seems quite clearly implied, yet in the primitive ages of the foundation of the monarchy, the patriarchal theory of continued existence in the persons of numerous descendants, or in the founding of a great name, was the usual form of the belief.

7. The reflection on what is implied in this ardent desire arrests the current of the thought; and the voice, manner and method of the olden poet are put aside, and those of the modern singer shine out instead. As—to recall an ancient instance—the seer Nathan before his erring King moves him by the skill and truth of his narration of the episode of the ewe lamb, and then thrusts aside recital for authoritative denunciation, "*Thou art the man!*" so here it seems that all the dramatic description of the earlier part of the poem has been only a leading-up to the proclamation of the truth of these concluding stanzas. The framework of the old story is still there; the personality of the sup-

posed hearer still assumed ; but the message is the development of the old meaning, and delivered for the raising of other despairing hearts and fainting souls. With the high instinct of compassion stirred to its fullest intensity, human weakness still prevents the heart that comprehends the need from bestowing the relief designed. With tender irony the poet rejects the impatience of presumption and the peevishness of disappointment ; and acknowledges the insignificance of all effort or capacity compared ~~with~~ the inspiration that gives birth to it, Scaling in thought the ladder of knowledge, forethought, power, the supreme faculty of Love is reached ; it, like them, to be recognized as a feeble dwarfed reflection of the Divine original. Seeing through the veil of things the loving intention of the Creator in the personality, character and environment of Saul, those who love Him most must feel that the mind that began will complete the life ; and that bestowal of so many gifts augurs the coming of the supreme one that Love would bestow. The splendid optimism of Browning's thought shines out in the confidence that the shadow of failure, error and ruin is not permanent : that there is an influence strong enough to transform, and a judgment clear enough to try—not merely the achievement—but the aim.

8. Thus, instead of sinking back despondent

*Stanza*  
*xviii.*

from the realization of powerlessness, the enlightened mind finds comfort in the knowledge that to have willed is the spiritual equivalent of to have done; and thence holds the inspired certainty that the conception of the desire reveals the truth that somewhere is the Power that gave it birth and that will fulfil it.

The manifestation of this union of the highest human intention with the attainment of it is to be recognized in the person of the Messiah. So the completion of the poem, as though the rest of the story of Saul were unknown, is justified; it is more than justified; it is splendidly in keeping with the silent consciousness of that ending whose sting is thus removed. For, though delayed, the "difficult moment" was not too difficult; the vision might well awaken "from the dream, the probation, the prelude," this most erring and desolate of the "spirits in prison."<sup>1</sup>

9. The closing stanza re-asserts the personality

*Stanza*  
*xix.*

of the supposed narrator.<sup>1</sup> We see the mysterious Eastern night, and the surroundings of the singer's early home we realize something of the dim terrors of the universe to the mind of primitive man, and

<sup>1</sup> He went and preached unto the spirits in prison (1 Peter iii. 19).

not less clearly the sense of the friendliness and harmony with the simplicity of Nature which the world now vainly seeks to recover. But speaking through the circumstances of the outward form is the interpreting thought of the modern poet, who thus clothes the historical event of the Past in the garb of subjective experience. The young Hebrew singer awoke to the consciousness of a transfigured earth, through the stress of the spiritual endeavour he was stirred to make ; and no less surely does the vision belong to every deep experience of the ages since.

Readers may be interested to study Christopher Smart's SONG TO DAVID, which Browning much admired. It will be remembered that C. Smart is commemorated amongst Browning's PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE IN THEIR DAY.

## NOTES

- I. 2. "*Kiss my cheek, wish me well!*"  
The Eastern modes of greeting and farewell were essentially more dramatic and impassioned than the Western; and the kiss formed part of the sacred rite between those bound by ties of duty or affection.
- II. 2. "*Lilies still living and blue.*" Possibly the fragrant anemone which abounds in Palestine. The fresh beauty of the youth and the dainty protection of his instrument evidently delight the anxious veteran.
- III. 1. "*Then I . . . knelt down to the God of my fathers.*" Cf. *Ps. cxix. 164.*  
"Seven times a day do I praise Thee."
- IV. 4. "*The King-Serpent all heavily hangs.*"  
Of the twenty varieties of serpent in Palestine two kinds at least are large and gaudily marked. When casting its slough the great creature assists itself by pressure against the forked

branch of a tree, and sometimes the rejected skin may be seen hanging thereto, a ghastly memory of its former sinuous beauty.

V. 3. The pastoral tribes of the East still lead—not drive—their sheep, and the shepherd's pipe is more than an ornamental adjunct.

VI. 1-3. The simple cadences, partly imitative, of the cries of wild creatures or the notes of birds, partly the traditional musical phrases of the herdsmen. Cf. the *jodel* of the Alpine goatherds.

VII. 1. 3. An interesting branch of folk-lore is that concerned with the labour-songs, nuptial-chants and dirges of the people. One of the earliest examples of Bible poetry is the "Song of the Well" (*Numbers* xxi. 17):—

"Spring up, O well ;

Sing ye unto it.

The princes digged the well,

The nobles of the people digged it,

By the direction of the law-giver,

With their staves."

In primitive ages the wailing of dirges was probably a religious duty on the part of the neighbours of the dead man ; later the custom developed into the

employment of professional mourners

9. The building of bridges was in early times a corporate task of the community, undertaken at a convenient season and shared in by every grown man. Perhaps we may recognize in it the germ of civic duty and service.
  12. The institution by Samuel of the "Schools of the Prophets" had given a great impetus to the study and practice of choral music. At this time it was undoubtedly simpler than in the later days when the Songs of Ascents formed the succession of anthems; but it is quite reasonable to suppose that some splendid chorale was known to and loved by the whole population; as are our own "O God of Bethel," and the "Old Hundredth."
- VIII. 4. "*Lordly male-sapphires.*" The true Oriental sapphire, or jacinth, is a splendid blue stone marvellously transparent. Amongst the Hebrews, as with most Eastern peoples, precious stones were valued not only for their beauty or their rarity, but also for their supposed power to avert misfortune. Each had, too, its symbolical significance.

XII. 32. "*A grey mountain of marble.*" The tombs of the Assyrian and Egyptian kings were such as this; and the imperishable scrolls on the "rock's naked face" recording the victories of the mighty dead are being gradually deciphered by the scholars of the modern world.

XV. 5, 7. "*The swathes of his turban . . . armlets of price.*" As early as the time of Saul there was great splendour assumed in the apparel of royal and noble persons.

Throughout this description runs the rich paraphrase of the Bible description: "From his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" (1 Sam. ix. 2).



**AN EPISTLE**  
**CONTAINING THE**  
**STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCES OF**  
**KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN**



AN EPISTLE  
CONTAINING THE  
STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCES OF  
KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN

KARSHISH, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,  
The not-incurious in God's handiwork  
(This man's-flesh He hath admirably made.  
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,  
To coop up and keep down on earth a space, 5  
That puff of vapour from His mouth, man's soul)  
—To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,  
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,  
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks  
Befall the flesh through too much stress and  
strain, 10

Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip  
Back and rejoin its source before the term,—  
And aptest in contrivance (under God)  
To baffle it by deftly stopping such :—  
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home 15  
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame  
with peace)

Three samples of true snake-stone—rarer still,  
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped

## 62 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs),  
 And writeth now the twenty-second time. 20  
 My journeyings were brought to Jericho :  
 Thus I resume. Who studious in our art  
 Shall count a little labour unrepaid ?  
 I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone  
 On many a flinty furlong of this land. 25  
 Also, the country-side is all on fire  
 With rumours of a marching hitherward :  
 Some say Vespasian cometh ; some, his son.  
 A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear ;  
 Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls ; 30  
 I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.  
 Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,  
 And once a town declared me for a spy ;  
 But at the end I reach Jerusalem,  
 Since this poor covert where I pass the night, 35  
 This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence  
 A man with plague-sores at the third degree  
 Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest  
 here !

Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,  
 To void the stuffing of my travel scrip 40  
 And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.  
 A viscid choler is observable  
 In tertians, I was nearly bold to say ;  
 And falling-sickness hath a happier cure  
 Than our school wots of. There's a spider  
 here 45

Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,  
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back.  
Take five and drop them . . . but who knows  
his mind,

The Syrian run-a-gate I trust this to ?

His service payeth me a sub~~l~~imate 50

Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.

Best wait : I reach Jerusalem at morn,

There set in order my experiences,

Gather what most deserves, and give thee all—

Or, I might add, Judæa's gum-tragacanth 55

Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,

Cracks 'tween the pestle and the porphyry,

In fine, exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease

Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy :

Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar—60

But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay ! my Syrian blinketh gratefully,

Protesteth his devotion is my price—

Suppose I write what harms not, though he  
steal ?—

I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush, 65

What set me off a-writing first of all.

An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang !

For, be it this town's barrenness, or else

The Man had something in the look of him,

His case has struck me far more than 'tis  
worth. 70

64 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

So, pardon if (lest presently I lose,  
In the great press of novelty at hand,  
The care and pains this somehow stole from  
me)

I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind.  
Almost in sight, for—wilt thou have the  
truth?—

75

The very man is gone from me but now,  
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.  
Thus then; and let thy better wit help all!

+ 'Tis but a case of mania: subinduced  
By epilepsy, at the turning-point 80  
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days  
When, by the exhibition of some drug  
Or spell, exorcisation, stroke of art  
Unknown to me, and which 'twere well to  
know.†

The evil thing out-breaking, all at once, 85  
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,  
But flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide,  
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,  
The first conceit that entered might inscribe  
Whatever it was minded on the wall 90  
So plainly at that vintage, as it were,  
(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent  
Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls  
The just-returned and new-established soul  
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart 95

That henceforth she will read or these or none.  
And first—the man's own firm conviction rests  
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)—  
That he was dead and then restored to life  
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe : 100  
'Sayeth the same bade " Rise " and he did rise.  
" Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.  
Not so this figment ! not, that such a fume,  
Instead of giving way to time and health,  
Should eat itself into the life of life. 105  
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones, and all !  
For see, how he takes up the after-life.  
The man—it is one Lazarus, a Jew,  
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,  
The body's habit wholly laudable, 110  
As much, indeed, beyond the common health  
As he were made and put aside to show.  
Think, could we penetrate by any drug  
And bathe the wearied soul and worried  
flesh,  
And bring it clear and fair, by three days'  
sleep ! 115  
Whence has the man the balm that brightens  
all ?  
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.  
Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,  
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,  
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke, 120  
Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—

## 66 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

He listened not except I spoke to him,  
But folded his two hands and let them talk,  
Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no  
fool:

And that's a sample how his years must go. 125  
Look if a beggar, in fixed middle life,  
Should find a treasure;—can he use the same  
With straitened habitude and tastes starved-  
small,

And take at once to his impoverished brain—  
The sudden element that changes things, 130  
That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand,  
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?  
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth,  
Warily parsimonious when no need,  
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times? 135  
All prudent counsel as to what befits  
The golden mean, is lost on such an one:  
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.  
So here—we call the treasure knowledge,  
say,—

Increased beyond the fleshly faculty, 140  
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,  
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven:  
The man is witless of the size, the sum,  
The value in proportion of all things.  
Or whether it be little or be much. 145  
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments  
Assembled to besiege his city now.



And of the passing of a mule with gourds—  
'Tis one ! Then take it on the other side,  
Speak of some trifling fact,—he will gaze rapt 150  
With stupor at its very littleness,  
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed  
He caught prodigious import, whole results ;  
And so will turn to us the bystanders  
In ever the same stupor (note this point) 155  
That we too see not with his opened eyes.  
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,  
Preposterously, at cross purposes.  
Should his child sicken unto death,—why,  
look

For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness, 160  
Or pretermission of the daily craft !  
While a word, gesture, glance from that same  
child

At play or in the school or laid asleep,  
Will startle him to an agony of fear,  
Exasperation, just as like, Demand 165  
The reason why—" 'Tis but a word," object—  
" A gesture "—he regards thee as our lord,  
Who lived there in the pyramid alone,  
Looked at us (dost thou mind ?) when being  
young

We both would unadvisedly recite 170  
Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,  
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst  
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.

## 68 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

Thou and the child have each a veil alike  
 Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye  
     both 175

Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match  
 Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know !

He holds on firmly to some thread of life

(It is the life to lead perforcedly)—

Which runs across some vast distracting orb 180

Of glory on either side that meagre thread,

Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet,—

The spiritual life around the earthly life :

The law of that is known to him as this,

His heart and brain move there, his feet stay  
     here. 185

So is the man perplexed with impulses

Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,

Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,

And not along, this black thread through the  
     blaze :

" It should be " baulked by " Here it cannot  
     be." 190

And oft the man's soul springs into his face

As if he saw again and heard again

His sage that bade him " Rise " and he did rise.

Something, a word, a tick o' the blood within

Admonishes : then back he sinks at once 195

To ashes, who was very fire before,

In sedulous recurrence to his trade

Whereby he earneth him the daily bread ;

And studiously the humbler for that pride,  
Professedly the faultier that he knows 200  
God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.  
Indeed the especial marking of the man  
Is prone submission to the heavenly will ;  
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.  
'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last 205  
For that same death which must restore his  
being  
To equilibrium, body loosening soul.  
Doomed even now by premature full growth :  
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live  
So long as God please, and just how God please, 210  
He even seeketh not to please God more  
(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please,  
Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach  
The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be  
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do : 215  
How can he give his neighbour the real ground,  
His own conviction ? Ardent as he is,  
Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old  
" Be it as God please," reassureth him.  
I probed the sore as thy disciple should : 220  
" How, beast," said I, " this stolid carelessness  
Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march  
To stamp out like a little spark thy town,  
Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once ? "  
He merely looked with his large eyes on me. 225  
The man is apathetic, you deduce ?

## 70 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

Contrariwise he loves both old and young,  
 Able and weak, affects the very brutes  
 And birds, how say I? flowers of the field,  
 As a wise workman recognizes tools 230  
 In a master's workshop, loving what they make.  
 Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:  
 Only impatient, let him do his best,  
 At ignorance and carelessness and sin:  
 An indignation which is promptly curbed; 235  
 As when in certain travel I have feigned  
 To be an ignoramus in our art  
 According to some preconceived design,  
 And happened to hear the land's practitioners  
 Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance, 240  
 Prattle fantastically on disease, †  
 Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object—Why have I not ere this  
 Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene. 245  
 Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,  
 Conferring with the frankness that befits?  
 Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech  
 Perished in a tumult many years ago,  
 Accused—our learning's fate—of wizardry, 250  
 Rebellion, to the setting up a rule,  
 And cried prodigious as described to me.  
 His death which happened when the earth-  
 quake fell  
 (Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss

To occult learning in our lord the sage    255  
Who lived there in the pyramid alone)  
Was wrought by the mad people—that's their  
wont!

On vain recourse, as I conjecture it.  
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—  
How could he stop the earthquake? That's  
their way!    260

The other imputations must be lies :  
But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,  
In mere respect for any good man's fame.  
(And after all our patient Lazarus  
Is stark mad ; should we count on what he  
says ?    265

Perhaps not : though in writing to a leech  
'Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)  
This man, so cured, regards the curer, then,  
As—God forgive me ! who but God Himself,  
Creator and Sustainer of the world,    270  
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile !  
—'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,  
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his  
own house,

Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,  
And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat, 275  
And must have so avouched himself, in fact,  
In hearing of this very Lazarus,  
Who saith—but why all this of what he saith ?  
Why write of trivial matters, things of price

72 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

Calling at every moment for remark ? 280  
 I noticed on the margin of a pool  
 Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort  
 Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange !

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,  
 Which, now that I review it, needs must  
 seem 285

Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth !  
 Nor I myself discern in what is writ  
 Good cause for the peculiar interest  
 And awe indeed this man has touched me  
 with.

Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness 290  
 Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus :  
 I crossed a ridge of short, sharp broken hills  
 Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came  
 A moon made like a face with certain spots  
 Multiform, manifold and menacing : 295

Then a wind rose behind me. So we met  
 In this old sleepy town at unawares,  
 The man and I. I send thee what is writ.  
 Regard it as a chance, a matter risked  
 To this ambiguous Syrian : he may lose, 300  
 Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.  
 Jerusalem's repose shall make amends  
 For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine ;  
 Till when, once more thy pardon and fare -  
 well ! 305

The very God ! think, Abib ; dost thou think ?  
So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too—  
So, through the thunder comes a human voice  
Saying, " O heart I made, a heart beats here !  
Face My hands fashioned, see it in Myself !

Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of  
mine : 310

But love I gave thee with Myself to love,  
And thou must love Me Who have died for  
thee ! "

The madman saith He said so : it is strange.

## OUTLINE STUDY

IN this poem is seen to the full Browning's unique power of being interested in, and representing so as to interest his readers, the personality of some forgotten individual of long ago, and an unfamiliar aspect of a well-known episode. The Raising of Lazarus, as told in the stern simplicity of the Gospel narrative, is entirely concerned with the miraculous restoration to his weeping sisters of the subject of the recital. In the poem is indicated something of the strangeness that must for ever mark off from his fellows the one who, having passed the gate of death, returns to resume his place in the world.

The writer, an Arab physician, is a representative of one of the great races of antiquity to whom we proudly attribute the love and zeal for knowledge which were in years to come to kindle the torch of learning in Europe. We obtain a pleasant glimpse of the conditions under which the wandering scholar of those far-distant days made acquaintance with strange countries and gathered additions to his lore;



and are made to realize the devotion felt by these genuine disciples of learning for their masters and teachers. The Arabians with the Jews looked back to Abraham as their common ancestor, and visited Palestine as the cradle of their race. The favoured position of the little strip of territory, its varied scenery, extreme fertility, and its stirring political history undoubtedly contributed to make it hold something of the position in the minds of the Arabs that England holds to-day for the cultured American. By this time, probably about 50 A.D., the Roman occupation had left its marks upon the land: notably perhaps in the northern part, where the hot springs and the more genial natural features made some of its towns attractive places of residence for the Roman and Jewish aristocracy. Karshish, the traveller from Arabia, would enter Palestine by Capernaum, the military garrison-town at the junction of the four great roads from Tyre, Damascus, Arabia and Egypt, and overlooking the "Sea of Tiberias," as the re-named Lake Gennesareth was then to be known. The arduous nature of the journey is well suggested in the brief description of some of the perils encountered. The "flinty furlongs" were probably the least to be dreaded; wild beasts, robbers and suspicious authorities combining then and for long

centuries afterwards, to make travel a matter of danger suitable indeed for a litany. Added to the permanent difficulties was the general unrest consequent on a rumour of the coming of the Roman army on its periodical march to instil becoming awe of the supreme power, and to this end dealing out rough and relentless chastisement for insubordination.

Bethany, a little village of some importance, lay not quite two miles outside Jerusalem on a shoulder of the Mount of Olives. Lovers of the mountainous scenery of our own land, who have paced and climbed some of its ancient highways and noted the arduous toil of early traffic may enjoy supplementing the brief description of Karshish, the Arab physician, by constructing an itinerary of his journey through the country. The means of communication, too, are characteristic of Eastern lands: day by day the traveller secures some volunteer "run-a-gate" to traverse the weary leagues and bear the scholar's message to his master. This epistle is the twenty-second thus despatched; each conveying, we may be sure, items of medical lore, notes on the botanical wealth of the country, local characteristics, and professional details of the prevailing diseases and ailments. The widespread ophthalmia of the Syrian lands claims attention, the physician's messenger suffering

thus, and his loyal service is believed to be offered in requital of some judicious remedy Karshish has supplied.

The Epistle suggests many characteristics that harmonize with the supposed writer. The opening address, in which the elaborate parentheses are not merely Browning, is quite in accord with the examples we have in the New Testament of the Eastern letter-writer. Stripped of its devout apostrophes to Deity and to medical lore it would run :—

“ Karshish, the picker-up of learning’s crumbs,  
The not-incurious in God’s handiwork,

\* \* \* \*

To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,  
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,  
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home  
Sends greeting, . . .

Three samples of true snake-stone, rarer still,  
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped. . . .  
And writeth now the twenty-second time.”

Perhaps the method was as purely a convention as our own, with its employment of a term of affection and formal superscription of good faith, but there is a certain leisurely grace in the Oriental fulsomeness which is singularly impressive. Of the purely professional, even technical details, are the mention (grotesque enough) of “ plague-sores at the third degree ” ;

the "viscid choler" observable in tertian ague; the successful treatment by means of distilled spiders of "falling-sickness" or epilepsy; the "sublimate" sprayed up the nostril to alleviate the inflammation of the eye; and the superiority of Judæa's gum-tragacanth and blue-flowering borage.

Later travellers have told us that the plains of Palestine are gay with many of our own British wild-flowers, and its pools and springs shelter familiar aquatic plants. Especially is this the case in Galilee, and the reedy shores of the Jordan in its tortuous course abound in handsome flowering growths. The writer of the Epistle undoubtedly has only a scientific love for flowers: they are valuable as adjuncts in his art; as are the skilful or the vagrant insects that abound. Besides the profoundly interesting by-way open to us in the tracing of natural features and products to catch the observant eye on this journey, there is suggested the half-forgotten lore of ancient medical science. Though it was largely empirical, yet it comprised a considerable body of systematized knowledge, much of which is incorporated with modern curative lore. The immense strides made in surgical skill, largely due to delicacy of instruments and knowledge of antiseptics, are hardly paralleled on the medical side, except in the direction of stamping

out diseases chiefly due to lack of cleanliness. The curative properties of simple herbs are valued as highly as ever, and returned to through a succession of changing fashions. We are all familiar with the "gum arabic" of which this writer protests that Judæa contributes the finest quality. It does not exude freely, but is obtained by excision of the bark of the *Astragalus tragacantha*.

The real object of the Epistle is to relate the extraordinary impression made upon the writer by his meeting with a certain Lazarus, who, in an advanced state of epilepsy, lay in a trance for three days and then marvellously recovered. That is not all; the recovery, on his own showing, was occasioned by no mysterious powerful drug, but by the influence and command of a fellow-Jew. Moreover, Lazarus was himself convinced that it was no trance; but that he had passed the gate of death, and was thence recalled to fill again his place in the world. So strange an experience had left its mark behind: no longer has the man the same conceptions, ideas and standard of measurement as before. Things once trivial are now often most important; things weighty, so unmeaning that he can pay no heed to them.

This is a condition which under Browning's impressive treatment we feel to be inevitable.

He who has passed through the portals we call Death has undergone an experience which must have wrought a great and abiding change in his estimate of life and the things of life. The enlargement of vision, extension—and perhaps we may say the *intension*—of understanding, the widening of conception and yet withal the imprisoning of the powers again in the human individual,—all this implies, indeed, a state of strangeness that fills one with a vague discomfort to read about. “Flinging the gates of life too wide,” is a fine and subtle description of the mysterious effect. If we consider how far and how greatly our limitations protect us we can in some degree realize the intolerable anguish of highly intensified powers of hearing or of sight ; still more of a similarly increased power of mental perceptions and sympathy. “Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth” would be a rending rather than a soothing influence. The strange sense of disproportion with earthly estimates is illustrated by the striking analogy of the beggar: Should such an one after years of poverty and privation suddenly become possessed of affluence it would be impossible for him to accustom himself to its plenitude. Unreasoning stint or unreasoning extravagance would be the erratic accompaniments of his perplexing wealth. Thus the restored Lazarus :

he hardly listens to matters which his fellow-villagers feel to be gravely important, and gazes rapt at some trifling episode : for he is burdened with the knowledge of the true worth of things, and beholds them with "opened eyes."

The writer Karshish recalls to his master's memory some familiar incident of their youth ; the grave, rebuking, authoritative glance of a hermit-magician when young presumption ventured too far, and sought to trifle with the insignia or apparatus of his art. Even so the placid-browed Lazarus regards some child's antic, though he is hardly moved to interest by some far more momentous-seeming occurrence. Throughout the whole Epistle it is evident that the writer is not able to consider the strange occurrence which he relates as merely the skilful cure of a case of epilepsy by some Jewish physician. His whole description and the trend of his thought show that he has not been able to reject the idea that Lazarus had really died, and as really been restored to life again : now a man of fifty years or more, hale and hearty of body, and with this unaccountable child-like gaze upon the world ; this new, fresh habit of thought which no conventions could restrain or affect ;—a personality compelling attention and with a history worth careful study. So Karshish anticipates the natural

inquiry, Why not seek this physician and find out exactly what was done? He has desired to do so, but "the learned leech perished in a tumult many years ago"; and a striking touch is introduced when the earthquake of the Crucifixion is described as prefiguring the coming death of the sage, the hermit whose memory they both hold in honour! The Nazarene is supposed to have been appealed to for aid in the earthquake, and to have met His death at the hands of the populace for failing them: meanwhile the portents of that dreadful time shadowed the events of Arabian history! With many apologies the writer advances one of the traditions that have gathered around the name of the Jewish leech: His claim to be one with God Himself. The devout Arab, with the characteristic reverence of his race, can hardly bring himself to write that which sounds so profane; and having once written it will not repeat the statement. He seeks to account for the strong feeling of which he is conscious by describing the weird circumstances under which he first became acquainted with that strange personality. After a hard day's journey, with the dusk of evening falling, he rounds the shoulder of Olivet, a stony ridge of broken hills, "like an old lion's cheek teeth," with Bethany in sight. We are told that three roads descend thither,



one curving round the eastern and one the western slope, whilst the oldest, after the manner of old roads, passes over the summit and falls steeply down to the peaceful vale. The moon breaking through the clouds with its strange charactery of spots clearly marked seems to betoken something out of the common use and wont, and a shivering wind springs up.

“ So we met

In this old sleepy town at unawares,  
This man and I.”

With so much of the journey accomplished, with Jerusalem all but in sight ; past perils, present accomplishment, the ardours of discovery and promise of further attainment,—all are alike forgotten in the strange and solemn interest of this chance meeting.

With some added expressions of compunction at the length of the recital the letter ends : but the theme is again renewed in a postscript. We see something of the devout ardent soul under the calm professional exterior of the scientific traveller, as with no attempt at disguising his feeling he bursts into an impassioned appeal—

“ The very God I think, Abib ; dost thou think ?  
So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too.”

Here, as in *Saul*, Browning articulates the fundamental truth of his religious belief ; the

## 84 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

ultimate and unquestioned supremacy of Love.†  
We may well believe it to have been the yearning conviction of many a noble soul belonging to the ancient faiths of the world; and that the deep insight of the modern poet reproduces it with stirring effect.

“O heart I made, a heart beats here!

Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself!” 73

And in *Saul*—

“A Face like my face that receives thee; a  
Man like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever.”

p. 35

## NOTES

- ll. 1, 2. The peculiar Oriental self-abasement of the description hardly conceals the intellectual pride and delight in learning. The phrases recall many expressions in the Eastern lyrics that have come down to us in the Books of the Psalms. Cf. cxi. 2, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein"; and the great early example of scientific ardour, *Exodus* iii. 2, "And Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.'"
- ll. 4-6. *Gen.* ii. 7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

## 86 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

1. 12. *Eccles.* xii. 7: "And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."
11. 17, 18. Reputed cures for snake-bite, either as medicine or as charms. Nine of the twenty species of serpents found in Palestine are poisonous. These stones, perforated, were often worn, and hung on cattle, as protection against adders.
1. 29. The lynx is not explicitly named in the Bible, but with the jackal and the panther it is believed to have infested all parts of Syria.
1. 45. The zebra spider ; instead of catching its prey in a web it chases it in the open field. So late as the time of Queen Elizabeth we find the spider highly esteemed in medicine. Sir Walter Raleigh describes the distilling and preparation of a drug from spiders. †
1. 46. The rocky interstices of the surrounding hills were used as tombs by persons unable to afford a private garden. Possibly the approach to Bethany lay through such a ground.
1. 55. *Gum-tragacanth* (*Ar.: neca'at*). Twenty varieties of the *Astragali*, or lupine, grow in Palestine; they are dwarf

shrubs with pinnate leaves. This fragrant gum is supposed to be the "spicery" carried down to Egypt for sale in the very ancient times described in *Gen. xxxvii. 25.*

1. 57. *Porphyry.* Like the more familiar term *mortar* this refers to the hard non-porous material of which grinding-boards or bowls are made. The murex shell of the Tyrian dye furnished the required resisting medium ; also some natural rocks.
1. 80. "*A case of mania.*" The prevalence of epilepsy and mental diseases in the rural populations of Syrian towns is shown by the frequent references to "possession" in the Gospels. For the poor, medical aid was seldom forthcoming ; hence the afflicted held a kind of privileged position, half dreaded, half sacred, and except in the case of leprosy were neither driven forth nor shunned by their fellows.
1. 90. "*Conceit*" : here in the old true sense of conception, idea.
1. 101. "*A Nazarene physician.*" We are sure that popular rumour, and especially such of it as was trans-

mitted to travellers, would record the healing side of Christ's work, rather than the teaching side. Much of this latter was all uncomprehended even by His most intimate hearers ; but all could understand the recovered invalid and the restored lunatic.

11. 114-9. Five beautiful lines. The ardent scholar, keenly interested in the details of his profession, exults in the possibility of achieving such renewal as he witnessed in the person of Lazarus. The impetuous "Think!" and the eager question, "*Whence* has the man the balm that brightens all?" tell us more of the convincing effect of the intercourse than the writer himself was willing to admit.
11. 147-9. The contrasted "prodigious armaments" and "the passing of a mule with gourds" record the great disturbances and the simple quiet routine of the little hill town; to the transformed intelligence of Lazarus one is of as vital significance and import as the other.
1. 173. The ancient belief in the disintegra-

tion of the larger heavenly bodies anticipated the conclusions of modern science. "*Greek fire*": perhaps an intentional anachronism; the composition of nitre, sulphur and naphtha known as such is generally given as an invention of the seventh century A.D.

11. 179-91. Here the writer gives the philosophical conception of what this marvellous restoration means. All those enlarged perceptions that fit the soul to enjoy to the full the spiritual life that surrounds him, have to be curbed and restrained to the narrow limits of the dark thread of human life that stretches through this spiritual infinitude. Browning anticipates here much of the tendency of modern thought to recognize "planes of being" which may be attained even while living an ordinary earthly life.

1. 207. "*That same death which must restore his being*

*To equilibrium.*" In this is expressed the great truth that underlies all harmonious life. It were as hard for man to live dowered with gifts

of a higher order of beings as robbed of those attributes he has and thrust level with the beasts. The great experience in Lazarus drives him for solace to complete submission : utter abnegation of self. Here we recognize the exalted questions of many of the eastern mystics : a habit of mind apparently foreign to that of the alert, eager traveller, and yet one with which he is by nature and race in keenest sympathy.

1. 215. "*Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do*" : a touch of the intellectual arrogance of the learned in all ages. So, too, the description of his "probing the sore" : and striking is the description of the lofty meekness with which his contemptuous argument was received : "He merely looked with his large eyes on me." Then the generous, even enthusiastic, admission that this is no mere apathy : the writer thinks he recognizes at times the same strongly curbed impatience as that which he himself feels when listening, disguised, to the ignorant platitudes of unlearned practitioners of



his art. But this impatience and indignation are shown only when Lazarus is confronted with "ignorance or carelessness or sin": the three potent hindrances to the spiritual life.

1. 231. "*Our learning's fate.*" So late as the seventeenth century in Europe this holds true. Lord Napier of Murchistown, inventor of logarithms, was accounted a wizard by the majority of his fellow-countrymen. The early alliance of medical science with alchemy and with astrology gave rise to the practice of mysterious arts calculated to impress, no less than to achieve its purpose of healing.
1. 281. "*Blue-flowering borage.*" With a determined wrench from the matter to him so absorbing the writer contributes a "thing of price" in this botanical detail. The borage was much prized for distilling into a stimulating drink; we recognize it as one of our common English wild-flowers.
1. 301. "*This ambiguous Syrian.*" The shiftiness of the Syrian character is a

byword with travellers from the time of Karshish to our own day. But it is pleasant to think that in this instance gratitude for the healing effect of the "sublimate" will ensure the safe carriage of the document. Clad with a loose skin and girdle, bearing a pouch, we may imagine this lean runner speeding northward, crossing the sandy desert ; his food a few dates and some dried corn, his drink the water from the stream or the shady well ; and the wild fruits of the country his ample refreshment. He may be intercepted as a spy ; or seized and maltreated for sport by some Roman battalion, full of scorn for the "native" population, and detesting its obvious vices ; or he may reach safely the Arabian sage to whom he bears his missive, and receive his simple guerdon.

# A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL



# A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

SHORTLY AFTER THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING  
IN EUROPE

## I

LET us begin and carry up this corpse,  
Singing together.

Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes,  
Each in its tether

Sleeping safe in the bosom of the plain,

Cared for till cock crow ; 6

Look out if yonder be not-day again-

Rimming the rock-row !

That's the appropriate country ; there, man's  
thought,

Rarer, intenser,

Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,

Chafes in the censer. 12

Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and  
crop ;

Seek we sepulture

On a tall mountain, citied to the top,

Crowded with culture !

## 96 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels ;  
     Clouds overcome it ; 18  
 No ; yonder sparkle is the citadel's  
     Circling its summit.  
 Thither our path lies ; wind we up the heights,  
     Wait ye the warning ?  
 Our low life was the level's and the night's :  
     He's for the morning. 24  
 Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,  
     'Ware the beholders !  
 This is our master, famous, calm, and dead,  
     Borne on our shoulders.

---

## II

Sleep, crop and herd ! Sleep, darkling thorpe  
     and croft  
     Safe from the weather ! 30  
 He whom we convoy to his grave aloft  
     Singing together,  
 He was a man born with thy face and throat,  
     Lyric Apollo !  
 Long he lived nameless : how should spring  
     take note  
     Winter would follow ? 36  
 Till, lo ! the little touch, and youth was gone !  
     Cramped and diminished,  
 Moaned he, " New measures, other feet anon !  
     My dance is finished ? "

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL 97

No, that's the world's way ; (keep the mountain  
side,

Make for the city !)

He knew the signal and stepped on with pride  
Over men's pity ;

Left play for work, and grappled with the world  
Bent on escaping :

" What's in the scroll," quoth he, " thou  
keepest furled ?

Show me their shaping,

Theirs who most studied man, the bard and  
sage,—

Give !"—So he gowned him,  
Straight got by heart that book to its last page :

Learnèd we found him,

Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,  
Accents uncertain :

" Time to taste life," another would have said,  
" Up with the curtain ! "

This man said rather, " Actual life comes next ?  
Patience a moment !

Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed test,  
Still there's the comment.

Let me know all ! Prate not of most or least,  
Painful or easy !

Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,  
Ay, nor feel greasy."

Oh, such a life as he resolved to live

When he had learned it,

## 98 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

When he had gathered all books had to give !  
Sooner, he spurned it.  
Image the whole, then execute the parts—  
Fancy the fabric  
Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from  
quartz,  
Ere mortar dab brick !

72

### III

(Here's the town gate reached ; there's the market-place  
Gaping before us.)  
Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace  
(Hearten our chorus !)  
That before living he'd learn how to live—  
No end to learning :  
Earn the means first—God surely will contrive  
Use for our earning.  
Others mistrust and say, " But time escapes !  
Live now or never ! "  
He said, " What's time ? Leave Now for  
dogs and apes !  
Man has Forever."  
Back to his book then ; deeper drooped his head :  
*Calculus* racked him :  
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead :  
*Tussis* attacked him.

78

84



## A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL 99

"Now, master, take a little rest!" not he!

(Caution, redoubled! 90

Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)

Not a whit troubled,

Back to his studies, fresher than at first,

Fierce as a dragon,

He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst)

Sucked at the flagon. 96

Oh, if we draw a circle premature

Heedless of far gain,

Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure

Bad is our bargain!

Was it not great? did not he throw on God

(He loves the burthen)— 102

God's task to make the heavenly period

Perfect the earthen?

Did not he magnify the mind, show clear

Just what it all meant?

He would not discount life, as fools do here,

Paid by instalment— 108

He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success

Found, or earth's failure:

"Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered,

"Yes!

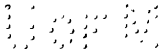
Hence with life's pale lure!"

That low man seeks a little thing to do,

Sees it and does it! 114

This high man, with a great thing to pursue,

Dies ere he knows it.



## 100 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

That low man goes on adding one to one.

His hundred's soon hit :

This high man, aiming at a million,

Misses an unit. 120

That has the world here—should he need the  
next,

Let the world mind him !

This throws himself on God, and unperplexed,  
Seeking shall find Him.

So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,  
Ground he at grammar ; 126

Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife,  
While he could stammer

He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be !—

Properly based *Oun*—

Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,  
Dead from the waist down. 132

Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place :  
Hail to your purlieus,

All ye highfliers of the feathered race,  
Swallows and curlews !

Here's the top-peak ; the multitude below  
Live, for they can, there : 138

This man decided not to Live but Know—  
Bury this man *there* ?

*Here*—here's his place, where meteors shoot,  
clouds form,

Lightnings are loosened,

## A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL 101

Stars come and go! Let joy break with the  
storm.

Peace let the dew send! 144

Lofty designs must close in like effects :

Loftily lying

Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,

Living and dying.

## OUTLINE STUDY

THE unnamed Grammarian whose elegy Browning sings in this poem has become a personality as clearly defined as if we could point to his birthplace and narrate the events of his life. In *Rabbi Ben Ezra* the modern poet, taking the mediaeval scholar for his mouthpiece, develops the idea which in germ constituted the characteristic thought of the devout Hebrew. In this poem is pictured another enthusiasm—the love of knowledge—and the subject might be any one of the classical scholars of Italy who laboured to restore the treasures of Greek and Latin literature to their countrymen. The place might be any one of the old Italian towns whose physical features are suggested; preferably perhaps Bologna or Orvieto.<sup>1</sup> There lived and worked many an obscure and unknown scholar, sharing in and helping to spread the enthusiasm for antiquity which has never since been entirely lost in Europe. It was natural enough that Italy should be the home of this awakening, since she possessed so many evi-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Stoford Brooke suggests that a German town is intended.

dences of her Roman and Greek ancestry ; and of all forms of earthly pride, perhaps the pride of race is the most ennobling.

Reverence for the past involved diligent search amongst the records of the past—the literature ; which had in its day expressed the aims and ideals of the people. If the ardent labours of these workers had taken the form of merely making accessible the thought of the past by rendering it in their own language, the whole history of modern literature would have been widely different. But they approached the old-world ideas with such a sense of reverence and delight that not only the matter was of importance, but also the form ; not only the thought but also its expression. Hence the study of the form became as absorbing as the study of the thought, and in this was involved all that we understand in the term “ Grammar.”

Through this perception of the value of the “ manner ” as well as of the “ matter ” grew up the study of the classical languages as instruments, which has lasted until our own day ; and the respect and attention paid to all those exercises of the human intellect which is comprised under “ Humane letters,” or as Oxford still calls it “ Literæ Humaniores,” is an outcome of the same spirit.

The fact that the attention of many scholars was concentrated upon peculiarities of external form, so that they hardly cared for the soul of the writing, led to an exaggeration of the values of minute points of language which to the average perception in all ages seem unimportant and even trivial. But their devotion was born of the love of knowledge for its own sake, and any capable of this in even a slight degree is moved by the picture.

Browning, with the sympathy of historical imagination, obtains a stirring effect by supposing the narration to be by one of the dead scholar's disciples. Perhaps one of the gravest losses attending the general spread of learning is that of this "discipline," which bound the loyalty of the learner to his teacher. "Knowledge is now no more a fountain sealed," indeed its waters are offered to, even thrust upon, many who have no thirst or desire for it, and who value it accordingly. As a marketable asset some of its forms may command a high price, but esteem for it for its own sake, the spirit of the disciple,—the "learning-knight" of our old Bible English,—is scarcely to be found.

## I

The opening lines bring before us the old-world town, the straggling procession with its central

burden, and we hear the dirge, half sorrow, half triumph.

"When the dead man is praised on his journey,

'Bear, bear him along

With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets!'"<sup>1</sup>

But the words we hear are the description of the ideas and impulses that govern the behaviour of the mourners, projected, as it were, on the canvas to illumine the scene. It is night as the journey begins, so that the destination shall be reached with returning light, and the quiet stillness of the mediaeval town, so vividly contrasting with its gay turbulent life by day, is clearly suggested. The goal is not merely a peak, but the highest peak of the mountain, at whose base cities cluster, and up whose sides are built the old-time straggling towns. The mention of the "citadel" recalls memories of the glorious Roman past, when the indomitable conquerors of the world planted their watch-towers on every vantage ground and carved and levelled their roads through or over every obstacle.

Thus the details of externals strike us; but besides these are the inner characteristics. A very clear touch gives us the intellectual arrogance so wont to distinguish the disciple if not the master; the arrogance which almost justifies the declaration that of all tyrannies under which human society may live—the tyranny of birth,

<sup>1</sup> *Saul*, vii.

## 106 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

of wealth, of intellect, the last-named would be the worst. The note swells out gloriously in the closing lines, rejoicing in his eminence and demanding of every uninterested spectator the recognition that their gallant bearing and lofty mien are the expression of their homage to their

*"Master, famous, calm, and dead."*

The real place of the great is beautifully indicated in the choice and placing of these three adjectives. We think of a remote world of thought where the noise of popularity hardly reaches, though the aloofness possible in life destroyed by the one great universal fact of death.

### II

The second part opens with a description of the personality of the dead scholar. The beauty of form and feature so distinguished amongst Southern nations accompanied the graces of youth and temperament, and he is represented as excelling in the frivolous pursuits of life until the zest for them was gone. Then, instead of indulging in discontent and bitterness, he sought for things of more lasting pleasure, and with a rage of desire embarked upon the search for knowledge. The usual paths were explored and then the less frequented ones; always to the enthusiast is there something more in front,



"the scroll thou keepest furled,"—that seen, it is to be mastered, text and comment! And the old learning abounded in commentaries: the accretions of traditional interpretations about the sacred text of the Jewish Scriptures stand as typical of the method of study. It is perhaps not entirely wide of the mark to see in the contrast between the book-maker of the past and the present almost exactly opposite aims. The labours of old writers so rarely gave any simplification of the few central truths discussed, but only opened up fresh avenues of thought. Now the impatience for easy acquirement invites the continual endeavour to make easy, at whatever cost; as though neither enthusiasm nor energy were to be expected in the learner, and under the inglorious system they will almost certainly diminish.

Nor was the thirst for knowledge merely self-sufficing; it was to lead up to the best life—always in the future, and, as the narrative has it with tender derision, "sooner he spurned it." The closing lines state a great principle which should underlie any worthy enterprise; one entirely opposed to the haphazard or "expediency" motive. Clear and definite plans are of the rudiments in the architecture of material structures, and are not less necessary in the building of character and conduct. ✓

## III

The noble recklessness born of this "peculiar grace" is held up to high emulation by the singer's "Man has Forever." In the little span of life so crowded, so fleeting, only the visionary can realize this. Only the mind lifted above desire for speedy enrichment or satisfaction can bear to wait for the sure, if tardy, fulfilment. The enigmatic solution, "heaven's success or earth's failure," is reminiscent of the philosophy of *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, and the next lines suggest another aspect of the truth proclaimed in that poem.

The trivial aim may well have its accomplishment; it is the great thing attempted, not the small thing achieved, that stamps actions with value.

Scattered throughout the ardent description are the warnings and exclamations of the bearers as they carry the bier with its sacred burden through the winding streets and up the mountain paths. In our own generation we have had two great instances of famous men being similarly borne to sepulture on a lofty height. Robert Louis Stevenson, the Tusitala of loving Samoan hearts, a genius in the world of thought; and Cecil Rhodes, no less a genius in the world of action.

Scattered too throughout are the ironical com-

ments that anticipate, and thus defeat, the casual criticism of heedlessness. The tender scoff that names the diseases in the beloved learned tongue, pictures the thirsty drinker increasing his pangs as he drinks, and uses the academic slang of modern instructed youth to deride his persistent labour, are examples of the humorous buoyancy of a large nature. Malicious jests, biting slurs, injurious suggestions give amusement to a certain order of mind, but they are nowise allied with the instinct for pure fun which can love and laugh. Grotesquely pathetic is the picture of the lovable pedant settling minute points of grammatical lore till the very moment when the numbing cold of death crept upon the eager brain. !!

The same mingling of tearful laughter is maintained till the end, and the effect is deepened by the recurrence of audacious rhymes. The topmost peak reached, its appropriateness is proclaimed. Lonely silence, desolate grandeur, storm-haunted heights, so remote from, so repellent to the warm clinging human sympathies that bind men together, are the fitting resting-place for this strange and isolated brother. Derisively turning popular estimate upon itself the narration ceases abruptly, and any one who has not smiled with the teller is uneasily conscious of being unable to smile at all. <

## NOTES

The metre of A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL is said to be unique in English verse. The rhyming is original and ingenious, and there are three notable examples of inventiveness: "fabric" and "dab brick"; "far gain" and "bargain"; and "failurę" and "pale lure." For a description of the natural features and characteristics of Italy consult any of the *Mediæval Towns* Series dealing with Italian cities; also J. Addington Symonds' *Italian Byways*. A funeral procession in a mountain pass, even in the miniature heights of our own land, is an impressive sight. Now that the roads and paths are so well made and well kept, the bier can usually be hand-borne, if not carried on wheels. Readers of Hall Caine's *The Shadow of a Crime* will remember the startling episode introduced there, the conditions of which involved no straining of fact.

"*Darkling thorpe and croft.*" Cf. Macaulay's description of the high villages in "the purple Apennines" (*Lays of Ancient Rome*).

"*Calculus*" and "*tussis*." Rheumatic and bronchial affections.

"*Soul-hydroptic*." Spiritual thirst which was increased instead of quenched by drinking.

"*Discount life*." To give less than the whole of time or pains, after the manner of debtors who paying by instalments before the whole sum is due, have an allowance made on each.

"*Hoti*," "*oun*." The various uses of *oti* and *ovv*, and especially their compactness of meaning, were clearly formulated only after generations of study of the classical writings. "The enclitic *δε*" has had a whole literature grow up to systematize the "doctrine" of this inseparable particle. The three examples represent niceties of grammar and quantity dear to the scholar.

"*Swallows and Curlews*." Why these? The curlew is associated with lonely heights and open moorland, but the swallow seems to belong to the homes and haunts of man. Their appearances in literature would form an interesting record.



**OLD PICTURES IN  
FLORENCE**

**H**





## OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

### I

THE morn when first it thunders in March,  
The eel in the pond gives a leap, they say :  
As I leaned and looked over the aloed arch  
Of the villa-gate, this warm March day,  
No flash snapped, no dumb thunder rolled  
In the valley beneath where white and wide,  
And washed by the morning water-gold,  
Florence lay out on the mountain-side.

### II

River and bridge and street and square  
Lay mine, as much at my beck and call,  
Through the live translucent bath of air,  
As the sights in a magic crystal-ball.  
And of all I saw and of all I praised,  
The most to praise and the best to see  
Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised :  
But why did it more than startle me ?

### III

Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,  
Could you play me false who loved you so ?  
Some slights if a certain heart endures

## 116 STUDIES FROM . BROWNING

Yet it feels, I would have your fellows know !  
I' faith I perceive not why I should care  
To break a silence that suits them best.  
But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear,  
When I find a Giotto join the rest.

### IV

On the arch where olives overhead  
Print the blue sky with twig and leaf  
(That sharp-curved leaf which they never shed),  
'Twixt the aloes, I used to lean in chief,  
And mark through the winter afternoons,  
By a gift God grants me now and then,  
In the mild decline of those suns like moons,  
Who walked in Florence, besides her men.

### V

They might chirp and chaffer, come and go  
For pleasure or profit, her men alive—  
My business was hardly with them, I trow,  
But with empty cells of the human hive :  
With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,  
The church's apsis, aisle or nave,  
Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch,  
Its face set full for the sun to shave.

### VI

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,  
Wherever an outline weakens and wanes,  
Till the latest life in the painting stops,  
Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick  
pains :

## OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE 117

One, wishful each scrap should clutch the brick,  
Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,  
A lion who dies of an ass's kick,  
The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.

### VII

For oh, this world and the wrong it does !  
They are safe in heaven with their backs to it,  
The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz  
Round the works of, you of the little wit !  
Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,  
Now that they see God face to face ?  
And have all attained to be poets ? I hope  
'Tis their holiday now, in any case.

### VIII

Much they reckon of your praise and you !  
But the wronged great souls—can they be quit  
Of a world where this work is all to do ?  
Where you style them, you of the little wit,  
Old Master This and Early the Other,  
Not dreaming that Old and New are fellows :  
A younger succeeds to an elder brother.  
Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.

### IX

And here where your praise might yield returns  
And a handsome word or two give help,  
Here, after your kind, the mastiff girns  
And the puppy pack of poodles yelp.

## 118 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

What, not a word for Stefano there,  
Of brow once prominent and starry ?  
Called Nature's Ape and the world's despair  
For his peerless painting (see Vasari).

### X

There stands the Master. Study, my friends,  
What a man's work comes to ! So he plans it,  
Performs it, perfects it, makes amends.  
For the toiling and moiling, and then, *sic transit !*  
Happier the thrifty blind-folk labour,  
With upturned eye while the hand is busy.  
Not sidling a glance at the coin of their neighbour !  
'Tis looking downward makes one dizzy.

### XI

"If you knew their work you would deal your  
dole " ;  
May I take upon me to instruct you ?  
When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,  
Thus much had the world to boast *in fructu*—  
The Truth of man as by God first spoken,  
Which the actual generations garble,  
Was re-uttered, and Soul (which Limbs betoken)  
And Limbs (Soul informs) made new in marble.

XII

So you saw yourself as you wished you were,  
 As you might have been, as you cannot be ;  
 Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there :  
 And grew content in your poor degree  
 With your little power, by those statues' godhead  
 And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,  
 And your little grace, by their grace embodied,  
 And your little date, by their forms that stay.

XIII

You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am ?  
 Even so, you will not sit like Theseus.  
 You would prove a model ? The son of Priam  
 Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use.  
 You're wroth—can you slay your snake like  
 Apollo ?  
 You're grieved—still Niobe's the grander !  
 You live—there's the Racers' Frieze to follow :  
 You die—there's the dying Alexander !

XIV

So, testing your weakness by their strength,  
 Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,  
 Measured by Art in your breadth and length,  
 You learned—to submit is a mortal's duty  
 —When I say " you " 'tis the common soul,  
 The collective I mean : the race of Man  
 That receives life in parts to live in a whole.  
 And grow here according to God's clear plan.

## XV

Growth came when, looking your last on them all  
 You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day  
 And cried with a start—What if we so small  
 Be greater and grander the while than they !  
 Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature ?  
 In both, of such lower types are we  
 Precisely because of our wider nature ;  
 For time theirs—ours, for eternity.

## XVI

To-day's brief passion limits their range :  
 It seethes with the morrow for us ; and more :  
 They are perfect—how else ? they shall never  
 change :  
 We are faulty—why not ? we have time in  
 store.  
 The Artificer's hand is not arrested  
 With us ; we are rough-hewn, no-wise polished :  
 They stand for our copy and, once invested  
 With all they can teach, we shall see them  
 abolished.

## XVII

'Tis a lifelong toil till our lump be leaven—  
 The better ! What's come to perfection  
 perishes :  
 Things learned on earth we shall practise in  
 heaven :  
 Work done less rapidly, Art most cherishes.

Thyself shall afford the example, Giotto!

Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,  
Done at a stroke, was just (was it not ?) "O!"

Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

### XVIII

Is it true that we are now and shall be hereafter,  
But what and where depend on life's minute ?

Hails heavenly cheer or infernal laughter

Our first step out of the gulf or in it ?

Shall Man, such step within his endeavour,

Man's face, have no more play and action

Than joy which is crystallized for ever,

Or grief, an eternal petrification ?

### XIX

On which I conclude, that the early painters,

To cries of "Greek Art and what more wish  
you ?"—

Replied, "To become new self-acquainters,

And paint Man, Man, whatever the issue !

Make new hopes shine through the flesh they  
fray,

New faces aggrandize the rags and tatters :

To bring the invisible full into play,

Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters ? "

### XX

Give these, I exhort you, their guerdon and glory

For daring so much before they well did it.

The first of the new, in our race's story,  
 Beats the last of the old ; 'tis no idle quiddit.  
 The worthies began a revolution,  
 Which if on earth you intend to acknowledge,  
 Why, honour them now ! (ends my allocution)  
 Nor confer your degrees when the folks leave  
 college.

## XXI

There's a fancy some lean to and others hate—  
 That, when this life is ended, begins  
 New work for the soul in another state,  
 Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins ;  
 Where the strong and the weak, this world's  
 congeries,  
 Repeat in large what they practised in small.  
 Through life after life in unlimited series ;  
 Only the scale's to be changed : that's all.

## XXII

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen  
 By the means of Evil that Good is best,  
 And through earth and its noise, which is heaven's  
 serene,  
 —When our faith in the same has stood the test—  
 Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,  
 The uses of labour are surely done ;  
 There remaineth a rest for the people of God ;  
 And I have had troubles enough, for one.



XXIII

But at any rate I have loved the season  
 Of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy :  
 My sculptor is Nicolo the Pisan,  
 My painter—who but Cimabue ?  
 Nor ever was man of them all indeed,  
 From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo,  
 Could say that he missed my critic-meed.  
 So, now to my special grievance. Heigh-ho !

XXIV

Their ghosts still stand, as I said before,  
 Watching each fresco flaked and rasped,  
 Blocked up, knocked out, or whitewashed o'er ;  
 —No getting again what the Church has grasped !  
 The works on the wall must take their chance ;  
 “ Works never conceded to England's thick  
 clime ! ”  
 (I hope they prefer their inheritance  
 Of a bucketful of Italian quick-lime).

XXV

When they go at length, with such a shaking  
 Of heads o'er the old delusion, sadly  
 Each master his way through the black streets  
 taking.  
 Where many a lost work breathes, though  
 badly—

## 124 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

Why don't they bethink them of who has  
merited !

Why not reveal, while their pictures dree  
Such doom, how a captive might be out-  
ferreted ?

Why is it they never remember me ?

### XXVI

Not that I expect the great Bigordi

Nor Sandro to hear me, chivalric, bellicose ;  
Nor the wronged Lippino ; and not a word I

Say of a scrap of Frà Angelico's :

But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,

To grant me a taste of your intonaco ?  
Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad  
eye ?

Not a churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco ?

### XXVII

Could not the ghost with the close red cap,

My Pollajolo, the twice a craftsman,

Save me a sample, give me the hap

Of a muscular Christ that shows the draughts-  
man ?

No Virgin by him the somewhat petty,

Of finical touch and tempera crumbly—

Could not Alesso Baldovinetti

Contribute so much, I ask him humbly ?

XXVIII

Margheritone of Arezzo

With the grave-clothes garb and swaddling  
barret

(Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so,  
You bald old saturnine poll-clawed parrot ?)

Not a poor glimmering Crucifixion,  
Where in the foreground kneels the donor ?  
If such remain, as is my conviction,  
The hoarding it does you but little honour.

XXIX

They pass : for them the panels may thrill,  
The tempera grow alive and tinglish ;  
Their pictures are left to the mercies still  
Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English ;  
Who, seeing mere money's worth in their prize,  
Will sell it to somebody calm as Zeno  
At naked High Art, and in ecstasies  
Before some clay-cold vile Carlino !

XXX

No matter for these ! But Giotto, you,  
Have you allowed, as the town-tongues babble  
it—  
Oh, never ! it shall not be counted true—  
That a certain precious little tablet  
Which Buonarroto eyed like a lover,  
Was buried so long in oblivion's womb  
And, left for another than I to discover,  
Turns up at last ! and to whom ? to whom ?

## XXXI

I, that have haunted the dim San Spirito,  
 (Or was it rather the Ognissanti ?)  
 Patient on altar-step planting a weary toe !  
 Nay, I shall have it yet ! *Detur amanti !*  
 My Koh-i-noor—or (if that's a platitude)  
 Jewel of Giamschid, the Persian Sofi's eye ;  
 So, in anticipative gratitude,  
 What if I take up my hope and prophesy ?

## XXXII

When the hour grows ripe, and a certain dotard  
 Is pitched, no parcel that needs invoicing.  
 To the worst side of the Mont S. Gothard,  
 We shall begin by way of rejoicing ;  
 None of that shooting the sky (blank cartridge),  
 Nor a civic guard, all plumes and lacquer,  
 Hunting Radetzsky's soul like a partridge  
 Over Morello with squib and cracker.

## XXXIII

This time we'll shoot better game and bag 'em hot,  
 No mere display at the stone of Dante,  
 But a kind of sober Witanagemot  
 (Ex : " Casa Guide," *quod videas ante*)  
 Shall ponder, once Freedom restored to Florence,  
 How Art may return that departed with her.  
 Go, hated house, go, each trace of the Loraine's,  
 And bring us the days of Orgagna hither.

XXXIV

How we shall prologuize, how we shall perorate,  
 Utter fit things upon art and history,  
 Feel truth at blood-heat and falsehood at zero-  
 rate,

Make of the want of the age no mystery ;  
 Contrast the fructuous and sterile eras,  
 Show—Monarchy ever its uncouth cub licks  
 Out of the bear's shape into Chimæra's,  
 While Pure Art's birth is still the Republic's !

XXXV

Then one shall propose in a speech (curt Tuscan,  
 Expurgate and sober, with scarcely an *issimo*)  
 To end our half-told tale of Cambuscan,  
 And turn the bell-tower's *alt* to *altissimo* :  
 And fine as the beak of a young beccaccia,  
 The Campanile, the Duomo's fit ally,  
 Shall soar up in gold full fifty braccia,  
 Completing Florence, as Florence, Italy.

XXXVI

Shall I be alive that morning the scaffold  
 Is broken away, and the long-pent fire,  
 Like the golden hope of the world, unbaffled,  
 Springs from its sleep, and up goes the spire  
 While " God and the People " plain for its motto,  
 Thence the new tri-colour flaps at the sky ?  
 At least to foresee that glory of Giotto  
 And Florence together, the first am I !

## OUTLINE STUDY

BROWNING's love for Florence and veneration for her treasures of art are here expressed with the light-hearted exuberance of the happy traveller. The quick gallop of the metre is in keeping with the humorous outlook of the poet, as standing at the gate of his villa he sees Florence outspread before him, and, with sympathetic inner vision, the long array of immortal works that make her famous. As in a "magic crystal ball" he reads from the long roll of her artists, and half gravely, half whimsically, upbraids his venerated Giotto for showing so little favour to a devout admirer. For amongst the recent discoveries of lost or neglected treasures in Florence has lately been that of a forgotten painting by Giotto. Why had not the painter's spirit, hovering around the glorious Campanile, not imparted to the poet-worshipper the secret of its hiding-place?

The slur cast upon the painters of the past by the neglect which has made possible such oversight and forgetfulness, is perhaps quite unre-

sented by their placid spirits ; yet in his half-amused, half-indignant disappointment at having no share in the re-discoveries, Browning peoples the streets of the beautiful city with the great presences which, as a poet, he is permitted to see " walking in Florence " with her citizens in the flesh.

Beginning with a contemptuous expression of regret for the decay of the old frescoes through want of care and protection, while conventional criticism praises and blames the acknowledged examples, Browning gives what is little less than a chronological sketch of early Italian Art. A deft turn, a sharp epithet, a glancing allusion introduced here and there, supply a critical commentary ; and the point of view is consistently that of the evolution and development of Art. • In *Stanza viii.*, in spite of its jerky construction and external flippancy, is expressed the great fundamental truth of all real appreciation of art. • Beneath the varying forms, and the apparently different aims of the successive " schools " of painting, there existed in every worker who has contributed anything to the world's store, the one supreme desire to paint what he saw with sincerity and truth. This unity underlies all the apparent diversity of artistic ideals : hence the work of the old masters is still to do : still in doing : was being done by

the neglected representatives whose names and pictures seem lost in oblivion; and whose influence still exists outside the narrow range of established conventions.

With *Stanza* xi. begins a most eloquent and luminous sketch of the transition from the Greek method. The goal of the art of this beauty-loving people and their disciples was the perfection of form. The "Truth of Man as by God first spoken" stands recorded in *Genesis* i. 26, 31: "God created man in His own image . . . and God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was Very Good." With daring irony the poet declares that this truth "the actual generations garble"; but that in the superb figures of Greek Art it is re-uttered, and again the inbreathed soul and the exterior body are a perfect whole. The highest excellence in this portrayal having been attained, the successors of the Greek sculptors could not hope to achieve the stately grandeur and moving beauty of the various forms of the Parthenon: all that is left for them is to *look within*: to endeavour to depict some truth hitherto unexpressed: some inner meaning undreamt of by the Greek in his absorption in beauty. Looked at in this way, the "faultily faultless" becomes expressive of a lower excellence after all: what matter if in lineament and stature



the new cannot equal the old if this falling short is due to a wider nature ?

This aspect is one in harmony with Brown-ing's favourite theory that the great thing attempted, even with apparent failure, is more than the small thing achieved. It may be as true of systems and ideas as of the individual that—

“ That low man seeks a little thing to do,  
Sees it and does it :

This high man with a great thing to pursue  
Dies ere he knows it.”<sup>1</sup>

A brilliant oratorical point is made in *Stanza xvii.*, clad in a perversely ingenious rhyme. The famous circle of Giotto, before Pope Boniface VIII, done at a stroke, was also a cipher, sym-bolical of Nothing : his worthier work, the bell-tower adjoining the Duomo of S. Mark, Flor-ence, was still unfinished : offering at once scope and inspiration to successive generations of artists. The statement of the aims of the early painters is a masterpiece of rhythmical compression : there is matter for a treatise in the suggestions of the lines,

“ Make new hopes shine through the flesh they  
fray,  
New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters.”

<sup>1</sup> *A Grammarian's Funeral.*

Perhaps it is not wide of the mark to recognize in this description the characteristics of Browning's poetry as distinguished from the chiselled finish and melodious softness of that of his great contemporary. No less it may sum up those of Wordsworth compared with the artificial conventions of the schools he superseded. Indeed, it is of almost universal application as metaphorically expressing, and glorying in, the necessary defects of a new revelation as it first makes itself articulate. The indignant query wins our heart-whole rejection when thrust at us thus—

"Shall man's face have no more play and  
action

Than joy which is crystallized for ever,  
Or grief, an eternal petrification?"

And we recognize that the expression of a deeper truth is worth some sacrifice of prettiness.

Besides this, the original workers in a new line have all the initial difficulties to overcome, so that they necessarily fail to do well what some successors may easily attain while "handing on the lamp." All the more, they deserve the guerdon and the glory for daring the adventure. Thus Browning reveals his essentially Berserker strain: intellectual and artistic in-

stead of material, but a true Viking of letters and of thought. Great untravelled tracts, wide fields of forgotten renown, dim lands of unknown history have an irresistible attraction for him. No fragment from his poems could more fitly serve as a motto for his character, perhaps, than the lines

“ . . . I shall thereupon

Take rest, ere I be gone

Once more on my adventure brave and new.” This is partly why there is such refreshment and exhilaration in the study of his poems: why it is worth while to ponder over and disentangle an apparently “ crabbed comment ” ; and to embark with some suitable equipment upon one of his “ adventures brave and new.” Even if our knowledge of Art, and especially of early Italian Art, is as faulty and scrappy as our hurrying age permits, the illuminating enthusiasm of *Old Pictures in Florence*, which only quite a few of us may ever be able to see, will, if we will let it do so, prevent the subject ever again being the confused medley of meaningless names that the mere reading of text-books engenders. It would add greatly to the present enjoyment of the poem to supplement the few helps of this volume with the reading of Mrs. Jameson’s *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, and the “ Giotto ” and

"Dante" in the *Great Painters* and *Great Writers* Series. Thus a feeling for the atmosphere of the poem and for the peculiar delight in names and associations expressed in it, becomes possible. To comprehend something of

"the season

Of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy," is to have entrance into the glowing romance of mediæval Italy; the land of S. Francis; of Dante; of Petrarch. The painter Giotto and the poet Dante were friends and fellow-pupils of the distinguished scholar Brunetto Latini; and the portrait of Dante figures with those of the other notables of Florence in Giotto's painting on the wall of the Palazzo dell' Podesti. Browning's enthusiastic veneration for the Past, and especially for the efforts and ideals of the personalities of long ago, his large understanding and sympathetic comprehension, make his poems the most stirring accompaniment to the study of history. With *Stanza xxiii.* begins the enumeration, in rattling verse and with not a few daringly defiant rhymes, of the early painters, the remains of whose works were crumbling and fading around him. Generations of careless custodians of churches, oratories, sacristies and the like had resulted in many beautiful paintings being hidden, or blocked up, or exposed to weather, or whitewashed over. The satirical

acceptance of the gibe that England could never produce such works, or, as is implied, appreciate them, is enlivened by the taunt that the treatment they have inherited is something less than appreciation. So vivid and striking is the description that we readily fancy we see the ghosts of these old masters thronging the streets where the neglected remains of their paintings fade and perish. The poet whimsically queries why they all ignore *him*, their devout and ardent lover ; why does none reveal to him the concealed panel, the whitewashed fresco or the hidden tablet ? He does not expect that the famous Ghirlandajo or Botticelli or Fra Angelico to condescend to show him ; but the copyists of Giotto, such as Taddeo Gaddi might condescend ; or the sculptor-painter, Pollajolo, or the experimenter, Baldovinetti, or the famous crucifix-painter, Margheritone, who was said to have died " of vexation " at the new methods of Giotto.

A not undeserved sarcasm is flung out in *Stanza xxix.* :—

" Their pictures are left to the mercies still  
Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English,"  
who value the paintings only for their price, and riotously admire the worthless if it is in the fashion. During these very months of the early spring of 1855 a small painting by Giotto was

discovered in Florence ; once perhaps the panel of a vestment-press, or the lid of a chest to contain the altar-vessels, and the object of Michael Angelo's admiration. Browning declares that he has haunted the churches and chapels, constantly disappointed, and as constantly taking heart again, and has had no such high fortune as to find a treasure like this : surely the spirit of Giotto might have revealed to him its hiding-place !

But he will not give up hope ; and in anticipation of some such happy discovery he announces the coming glories of Italy when she awakes to the realization of her greatest treasures and her high mission. Political freedom must come first, with the throwing off of the Austrian rule ; and after a complete purging from the sullyng authority, the Florentines shall take the lead in the friendly rivalry of the various cities in planning for the return of Art. The burial place of Dante and Ravenna had been for centuries coveted by his tardily appreciative city, which recognized too late the genius of her greatest son. It will be well to follow Browning's advice, and in this connection study *Casa Guidi Windows*, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Both these poets threw themselves heartily into the aspirations of Italy during the mid-period of the nineteenth century. With the banishing

of the "hated house" Browning anticipates the disappearance likewise of the Claude Loraine landscape school, and the renewal of the imaginative strength and beauty of Andrea Orgagna, follower and contemporary of Giotto.

The rather abstruse reference in *Stanza xxxiv.* is perhaps to be understood thus: In the exuberance of delight with the dawning of this brighter day all lovers of art will feel joyfully that there is a necessary ebb and flow in artistic, as in other, progress; and will identify the best periods of Art with the highest form of political freedom, of which true Art is the outcome; whilst its sterile ages as naturally occur with a monarchy. This is pointed with a daring allegory: the fostering care and nurture bestowed by monarchical power upon infantile Art transforms the shapeless "cub" into an unnatural monster. The strange and terrifying "chimæra," which tradition says Leonardo da Vinci painted upon a disc of wood for a peasant on his father's estate, in which he sought to rival the Medusa on the shield of Perseus is possibly in Browning's mind. On the other hand, the lovely babe, Pure Art, is the nursling of the Republic. The restoration of the past glories of Art is to be accompanied by the completion of Giotto's Campanile; which shall soar fifty cubits above the Duomo, and signalize

that as Florence sums up and completes the glories of Italy, so the bell-tower is the finishing touch to Florence. The allusion to the "curt Tuscan" is a backward glance at the ideals and labours of Dante, Giotto's contemporary, to whom was owing the cultivation of the vernacular language as a literary instrument.

In spite of the rollicking metre and the derisive touch every now and then, there is no question that Browning's heart was in his prophecy. He would love to be one of the gazing Florentines on the morning when the completed spire should shine forth "like the golden hope of the world," with the symbol of liberty and the motto of a free people flung out at its summit. At least his poet-sight makes him the first to foretell the happy day and celebrate its glories in his ringing verse.



## NOTES

- I. 1. For an account of the life of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Italy see the *Life and Letters*.
6. "*Water-gold*." An appropriate expression in the introductory lines of a poem which is to be much concerned with painters' media and materials.
- II. 4. "*Magic crystal-ball*." The peculiarly "near" effect of the sunlit air is well suggested by recalling this dwarfing effect. These quasi-scientific toys had considerable vogue in the middle of the last century, and undoubtedly Browning had experimented with such.
7. "*Giotto*," b. 1276, d. 1336. His earliest picture, which contains Dante's portrait, was painted on the wall of the mayoral hall at Florence. He was the pupil and protégé of Cimabue.

“ —Cimabue thought  
 To lord it over painting's field ; and  
     now  
 The cry is Giotto's, and his name's  
     eclipsed.”

*Purg.* xi. (*Cary*).

Summoned to Rome by Pope Boniface VIII,<sup>1</sup> he was commanded to give some proof of his skill. “ Hereupon Giotto, taking up a sheet of paper, traced on it with a single flourish of his hand a circle so perfect that ‘ it was a miracle to see.’ This at once convinced the pope of his superiority over other painters, and he was commissioned to execute many mosaics and paintings in Rome.” His frescoes in the church of Assisi, designed to represent the life and ideas of S. Francis, are allegorical ; and said to have been suggested by Dante. He also decorated the interior of a chapel for Guido da Polente, the father of the beautiful Francesca da Rimini, whose story is given in the Vision (*Hell*, v.). “ Like most of the early Italian artists he was an architect and a sculptor as well as a painter.

<sup>1</sup> Benedict XI.?

His last public work was the famous campanile or bell-tower, begun in 1334. . . . The designs were to illustrate, by a series of subjects, the development of human culture through religion and laws."

III. 6. "*A silence that suits them best.*"

The poet pretends to be hurt and offended that Giotto, silent amongst the other presences of the old city, should not have made known to his devoted lover the whereabouts of the little picture just discovered.

IV. 4. "*(That sharp-curved leaf . . .)*"

This little item of botanical lore thrust in the narrative of the verse shows us the green bower of the villa; and we see the pale sunshine of the early spring afternoon.

V. 4. "*The chapter-room, the cloister-porch . . .*"

The lavish decorations of the old churches of Florence reached to all their parts: unseen doorways; dark recesses; even the cupboards and chests of the vestries, and the corners of the cloisters showed the remains of pale frescoes or crumbling mosaic. Some readers may remember that there are some faint remains

of the kind in the excavated crypt of Canterbury Cathedral.

8. "*Its face set full for the sun to shave.*"

An allusion to the orientation of churches. The apparent deviation is often due to the extreme care with which the position of the altar was planned. It was designed so that, on the day of the patron saint, the sun as it appeared on the horizon should cast its rays on the shrine within which lay the relics.

VI. 4. "*Fainter pulse-tick pains.*" It is no far-fetched nonsense that imagines the forgotten worker's spirit pained by the neglect and decay of his work. The memory of this may stimulate some to a livelier appreciation of the treasures we possess in our own land, many of which are eloquent of the past.

VII. 3. "*Michaels and Rafaels.*" M. Angelo Buonarroti, b. 1476, d. 1564. Studied in the Academy of Ghirlandajo in the palace of Lorenzo the Magnificent: sculptor, painter, architect and poet. The walls of the town hall of Florence; the tomb of Pope Julius II (for which the Moses statue

was made); the ceiling of the Sistine chapel; the Medici chapel in the church of San Lorenzo and its statues; one of which is that known as *Il Pensiero*; and the "grandest picture ever painted," the *Last Judgment* on the wall of the Sistine chapel, are amongst the marvellous productions of his genius. Late in life he made a drawing of an aged man in a go-cart with the inscription, "Still learning," in allusion to his imperfect powers.

The following is one of the three of Michael Angelo's sonnets translated by Wordsworth, 1805:—

"Yes! hope may with my strong  
desire keep pace,  
And I be undeluded, unbetrayed;  
For if, of our affections, none finds  
grace  
In sight of Heaven, then wherefore  
hath God made  
The world which we inhabit?  
Better plea  
Love cannot have than that in loving  
thee  
Glory to that eternal Peace is paid  
Who such divinity to thee imparts

As hallows and makes pure all gentle  
hearts.

His hope is treacherous only whose  
love dies

With beauty, which is varying every  
hour :

But in chaste hearts, uninfluenced  
by the power

Of outward change, there blooms a  
deathless flower,

That breathes on earth the air of  
Paradise."

Raphael Sanzio d'Urbino, b. 1483,  
d. 1520. His short life of thirty-seven  
years was distinguished by the exhi-  
bition of a beautiful nature and the  
production of the most wonderful  
array of works of genius. "His  
works have been an inexhaustible  
storehouse of ideas to painters and  
to poets. Everywhere in art we find  
his traces . . . and to his great gifts  
were added the most genial, gentle  
spirit and the most winning modesty."

"His heavenly face the mirror of  
his mind ;

His mind a temple for all lovely  
things

To flock to and inhabit."

"*They are safe in heaven with their backs to it.*" We can fancy that Browning had in mind one of the frequent groupings in pictures of adoration : the kneeling crowd have their backs to the spectator.

- VIII. 8. *Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.* Leonardo Da Vinci, b. 1432, d. 1519 ; one of the marvellous group of painters, M. Angelo, Raphael, Correggio, Giorgione, and Titian, and himself the most universal genius. "A most profound and original thinker ; the greatest mathematician and most ingenious mechanic of his time ; architect, chemist, engineer, musician, poet, painter. The discoveries which made Galileo, Kepler, Castelli and other names illustrious, the system of Copernicus, the very theories of recent geologists are anticipated by Da Vinci within the compass of a few pages" (*Hallam*). He was the rival of Michael Angelo in the fresco painting of the Palazzo Vecchio at Florence. His "*Treatise on Painting* is the foundation of all that has since been written on the subject, whether

relating to the theory or to the practice of the art. His MSS. are particularly difficult to read, as he had a habit of writing from right to left instead of from left to right !”

Dello di Nicolo Dello, b. 1390, Florentine painter and sculptor. We can fancy that Browning altered the first dashing alliteration of his line—

“Da Vincis derive in due time from Dellos,” to the present reading.

- IX. 5. “*Stefano, there.*” Stefano Fiorentino, b. 1301, d. 1350. Living in an age when linear perspective was unknown, and oil-painting not yet invented, he yet succeeded so astonishingly in imitating form that he was styled by his contemporaries, “*Il Scimia della Natura.*”
- XII. 3. “*Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there.*” The triumphs of Greek Art were as far removed in excellence above later efforts as the deities of Olympus above men. Then are enumerated the transcendent qualities in four superb lines.
- XIII. 2. Examples of beautiful sculpture are given illustrating repose, movement,



anger, sorrow, energy and death; each one supreme. The *Niobe* and the *Dying Alexander* are at Florence; the rest are amongst the famous Elgin marbles at the British Museum. Casts of them may be seen at South Kensington.

XX. 8. "*No idle quiddit.*" A subtlety or captious nicety in argument; cf. quirk, quibble; *Lat.*, quidditas.

"*Nor confer your degree when the folks leave college.*" Browning's point seems to be that all present excellence is the outcome of the revolution begun by the early Italian painters, hence they may be considered to share in it: so "honour them now" instead of waiting until another new era shall dismiss them as completely as the Greek art was dismissed.

XXI. 8. "*Only the scale that's changed, that's all.*" Cf. Rudyard Kipling's *L'Envoi to The Seven Seas*: "When earth's last picture is painted . . ."

XXII. 7. Apparently Browning and Kipling think differently upon the state of future activities. The usual misquotation of "for" instead of

"to" appears here (see *Hebrews* iv. 9).

XXIII. 3. "*Nicolo the Pisan.*" b. 1205, d. 1278, sculptor and architect. Said to have been employed upon the bas-relief in the cathedral of Pisa while Cimabue was painting the frescoes. Beneath the dome stood the sarcophagus in which had been laid, a century before, the body of Beatrice, the mother of the Countess Matilda (see Dante, *Purg.* viii.); and its extreme beauty was an inspiration to him.

"*Cimabue.*" b. 1240, d. 1302, the patron and teacher of Giotto. His epitaph runs :—

"Cimabue thought himself master  
of the field of painting ;

While living, he was so—now he  
holds his place among the stars  
of heaven."

And to this Dante evidently refers in his mention of him in connexion with Giotto.

"*Ghiberti.*" Lorenzo Ghiberti, b. 1381, d. 1455. This was the time of the greatest prosperity of Florence. Under the family of the Medici the

city was at the head of all the states of Italy. A century before, the great baptistery of S. John had been built, and the sculptor, Andrea Pisano, had made a gate of bronze for it from the designs of Giotto. Now the guild of merchants commissioned seven of the leading sculptors of the age to compete in the production of a design worthy of a second gate; and Ghiberti the goldsmith was adjudged the finest workman. The subject of the Pisano gate had been the Life of S. John the Baptist; Lorenzo Ghiberti continued the story of the Redemption, beginning with the Annunciation and ending with the gift of Pentecost. He was further commissioned to construct a third gate, the baptistery being open on three sides. Michael Angelo declared that these gates were

“So marvellously wrought,  
That they might serve to be the  
gates of heaven.”

It may be remembered that there are copies of them in the South Kensington Museum

*Ghirlandajo.*" Domenico Bigordi, b. 1431, d. 1495, surnamed *Ghirlandajo* because of his invention of silver ornaments in the form of a wreath or *garland*. Until the age of twenty-four he was a goldsmith; he then studied painting and "carried the mechanical and technical part of his art to a perfection it had not before attained." Michael Angelo studied under him.

Thus the interval covered in *Stanza xxiii.* is nearly three hundred years.

XXIV. 6, 8. This summary quotation of insular self-depreciation gives an irresistible opportunity for an eccentric rhyme.

XXVI. 1. "*Bigordi.*" *Ghirlandajo.*

2. "*Sandro*" is Alessandro Botticelli, b. 1457, d. 1515.

3. "*Lippino.*" The son of Fra Lippo Lippi (commemorated by Browning elsewhere) and called "wronged" on account of the attributing of many of his pictures to other painters until the more careful criticisms of the early nineteenth century were made.

4. "*Fra Angelico.*" Giovanni Ange-

lico da Fiesole, frate of the convent of S. Mark, b. 1387, d. 1455. As a youth he was skilled in miniature illumination of missals and choir-books, and at the age of twenty took the habit of the Dominican order. A man of saintly life, as well as of high imaginative power and the finest artistic skill, he employed his long life in the painting of sacred subjects, and only once left his convent. This was when commanded to Rome by Pope Nicholas V to assist in the decoration of the Vatican. "Those who wished for any work of his hand were obliged to apply to the Prior of S. Mark, from whom Fra Angelico received with humility the order or the permission to execute it." (Mrs. Jameson). It was said that he felt painting to be a religious act, imploring the benediction of heaven upon it; indeed tradition had it that he actually "painted upon his knees." After his death the title of *Il Beato* was given him in veneration of his virtues and holiness.

5. "*Taddeo Gaddi*." b. 1301, d. 1366. This painter was the favourite pupil

of Giotto, and the greatest of his scholars and disciples. Like his contemporaries he was employed in the painting of the great cloistered cemetery, the Campo Santo; but none of his works there is in existence. Gaddi is said to have carried on the principles of expression originated by Giotto; who astonished his contemporaries by the innovation of making the "personages who are in grief look sad, and those who are joyous look gay." His skill in imitation of natural objects was excelled by that of his fellow-artist Stefano, already mentioned.

6. "*Intonaco*." Rough cast; probably the surface of much of the wall-work in the Campo Santi.
7. "*S. Jerome*." One of the sections of this cloister painting has for subject the Christian hermits. Giotto had painted S. Jerome, who was the object of peculiar homage since he had translated the Scriptures into Latin.
8. "*Lorenzo Monaco*." b. 1320, d. 1380. A Florentine painter who excelled in depicting the austere side of the lives of the saintly hermits: "some study

ing, some meditating, others tempted by demons in various horrible and alluring forms" (Mrs. Jameson).

XXVII. 2. "*Pollajolo*." Florentine painter, sculptor and goldsmith, b. 1433, d. 1498. The goldsmiths of the fifteenth century were famous for their *Niello* work; the tracing on metal with a sharp-pointed graver, and the lines then filled in with sulphate of silver. This was a favourite decoration of chalices, reliquaries, sword hilts, clasps, and all kinds of silver ornaments. One can fancy that the execution in a softer medium might betray the more robust skill of the draughtsman of the *Niellatori*.

6. "*Alesso Baldovinetti*." b. 1421, d. 1499. Worker in mosaic and in fresco. The tempera, or distemper, consisted of water thickened with white of egg or the juice of the young shoots of the fig-tree for mixing the colours, and all pictures until the middle of the fifteenth century were painted in this medium, not in oils. Highly seasoned board was used for movable pictures.

XXVIII. 1. "*Margheritone of Arezzo*." b. 1236,

d. 1313. A famous painter of crucifixes ; said to have died "through vexation" when Giotto excelled him in his art. He had been friend and contemporary of Cimabue, and adhered closely to the Greek manner, disliking and resenting the "naturalism" of the new methods. He is said to have been the first to experiment with canvas instead of board ; but the method was not adopted for nearly a hundred and fifty years after his death.

2. "*Barret.*" Cloak.

6. "*In the foreground kneels the donor.*" Many of the old pictures have additional interest from the portraits of contemporary characters introduced in them. Although some painters availed themselves too freely of the general sanction, and gave a tone of flippancy thereby, yet the practice of painting portraits for the subordinate characters was a legitimate artistic device. It will be remembered that in Haydon's great picture of *Christ's entry into Jerusalem* one of the kneeling elders is the portrait of Wordsworth.



XXIX. 6. "*Zeno*." Stoic philosopher, B.C. 495.

7. "*Clay-cold vile Carlino*." Representative of the modern degenerate school, which has its periods of fashion and esteem amongst dealers.

XXX. 5. "*Buonarroti*": M. Angelo. b. 1474, d. 1564.

XXXI. 1, 2. "*San Spirito*"; "*Ognissanti*."

Two of the old churches of Florence, dedicated to the Holy Ghost and All Saints. Here is another example of perverse rhyming; leading up to a group of allusive jokes.

4. "*Detur amanti*": Let it be given to lovers.

5. "*Koh-i-noor*." Mountain of light: the famous Indian diamond of the Mogul kings surrendered to Great Britain at the annexation of the Punjab 1849. It is with the crown jewels in the Tower of London.

6. "*Giamschid*." The mythical founder of the Persian Empire. See Omar Khayyám. The jewel was a carbuncle of mystic import as well as of great value, serving as part of the equipment of the prophet.

"*Sofi*." A dervish.

XXXII. 3. "*Mont S. Gothard*." The "worst" side was the Swiss side. "*Morello*" is a mountain near Florence.

In connection with the patriotic enthusiasm for the independence of Italy see Mrs. Browning's poems on the subject. Radatzky was an Austrian count sent to suppress the Lombardian insurrection during the stormy period 1766-1838.

"*The stone of Dante*." Dante's tomb at Ravenna had long been coveted by the once inappreciative Florentines; and the yearly celebrations of his death were the occasion for the renewal of political aspirations and the fostering of artistic and patriotic designs. Browning selects the name *Witanagemot* as typical of the colder Anglo-Saxon mind; which, once resolved, accomplishes its aims, as contrasted with the more fervid Southern feeling.

"*Lorraine's*," Claude Lorraine, landscape painter, 1600-42.

"*Orgagna*." Andrea Orgagna, b. 1306, d. 1370. Florentine goldsmith and painter; one of the

workers [in the Campo Santo at Pisa. His frescoes illustrate "The Four Last Things" (Mrs. Jameson).

XXXIV. 3. "*Chimæra*." A fabulous monster. The Chimæra of Leonardo da Vinci is thus described by Mrs. Jameson : "Aided by his studies in Natural History he collected from the neighbouring swamps and the river mud all kinds of hideous reptiles, as adders, lizards, toads, serpents ; insects, as moths, locusts ; and other crawling and flying obscene and obnoxious things ; and out of these he constructed a sort of monster which he represented as about to issue from the shield, with eyes flashing fire, and of an aspect so fearful and abominable that it seemed to infect the very air around."

XXXV. 1. "*Curt Tuscan*." Through Dante's labours and devotion the Tuscan, of all the dialects of mediæval Italy, became the Italian language. See his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* in the Temple Classics *Dante* (Dent).

3. "*Cambuscan*." King of Sana in Tartary, the hero of mediæval Eastern romance. The story is

## 158 STUDIES FROM BROWNING

given by Chaucer in his *Squire's Tale*.

5. "*Beccaccia*." Woodcock.

"*Braccia*." Cubits.

"*Fit ally*" and "*Italy*" are almost too startling.

XXXVI. 5. "*God and the People*." See Mrs. Oliphant's *Makers of Florence*. A collection of mottoes of historic cities and countries would make a most interesting exercise.







